

Developing MICE cities in Thailand: A benchmarking approach

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Abstract

Destination benchmarking in the context of the Meeting-Incentive-Convention-Exhibition (MICE) sector is one of the most significant yet most neglected areas in tourism research. Despite the importance of its subsequent economic benefits, little is known about the role of destination benchmarking vis-à-vis destination selection in the MICE sector. This PhD attempts to fill this gap by developing a destination benchmarking model specifically for the MICE sector, considering in detail the various factors that are deemed important in the destination selection process.

To achieve these aims, a sequential mixed-methods approach in two stages (qualitative and quantitative) was undertaken to research the population of stakeholders in the MICE industry in Thailand. Consequently, the study began with a series of 31 semi-structured interviews (first stage), in order to assess an existing benchmarking framework and identify key factors that contribute to destination benchmarking practices in alternative cultural contexts. The second stage consisted of a survey completed by 266 stakeholders in the MICE industry that ranked these factors via Importance Performance Analysis (IPA). The findings from the first stage, together with a review of the literature, found that the BESTBET framework is relevant and useful in developing MICE destination benchmarking as a conceptual framework in international contexts. To develop a conceptual framework for the development of MICE destinations in Thailand specifically, six additional factors were identified to account for the cultural idiosyncracies of the country.

These findings aid in the development of policy and planning initiatives at regional and national levels, in particular providing tangible recommendations for specific areas of improvement in destination planning and development.

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this Ph.D. research is my own and original work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person and that it has not been submitted to any previous application for a higher degree.

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List of Acronyms

| | |
|-------|---|
| B2B | Business to Business |
| B2C | Business to Customer |
| BACD | British Association of Conference Destinations |
| BET | Business and Event Tourism |
| CRT | Capital Region Tourism |
| CVB | Convention and Visitor Bureau |
| DEA | Data Envelopment Analysis |
| DEPA | Digital Economy Promotion Agency |
| DMC | Destination Management Company |
| DMO | Destination Management Organization |
| ICCA | International Congress Convention Association |
| IPA | Importance Performance Analysis |
| MIA | Meetings Industry Association |
| MICE | Meetings-Incentives-Conventions-Exhibitions |
| MICT | Ministry of Information and Communication Technology |
| MPC | Manufacturing Planning and Control System |
| MSA | Meeting Satellite Account |
| NTA | National Tourism Administration |
| NTOs | National Tourism Organizations |
| OECD | Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development |
| RTP | Regional Tourism Partnership |
| SMTEs | Small and Medium Tourism Enterprises |
| TCEB | Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau |
| TQM | Total quality management |
| TSA | Tourism Satellite Accounting |
| UNWTO | UN World Tourism Organization |

Chapter 1. **Developing MICE cities in Thailand: A benchmarking approach**

1.1 Background

The Meeting-Incentive-Convention-Exhibition (MICE) sector has been recognized as a significant segment throughout the past decade and is one of the leading sectors in the tourism industry, through its ability to attract large numbers of delegates and visitors to a host destination (Astroff & Abbey, 2006; Budhuseve & Tanghong, 2017; World Tourism Organization (WTO), 2006). The MICE industry is seen as one of the most important and rapidly growing tourism sub-sectors over the last decade (Sangpikul and Kim, 2009; Alexander, Kim and Groves, 2012). From a regional perspective, the USA, Germany and the UK respectively hosted the most significant number of MICE events, while the exhibition industry showed increasing growth in the sale of exhibition space in many Asia-Pacific countries over the past six years (ICCA, 2017). The Global Association of the Exhibition Industry reported that in 2017 the number of exhibitions being organized had increased continuously. The countries selling the highest volume of exhibition space were China, Japan, and South Korea respectively (Chubchuwong, 2019). Previous studies have highlighted a number of benefits associated with the MICE industry. For example, when MICE travellers visit and spend time in a country, it brings associated business profits from their expenditure (Buathong and Lai, 2019).

In addition, the MICE industry may also support local communities through the development of complementary leisure activities, as well as greater opportunities for hospitality firms, higher occupancy rates during the year and overall improvements in the quality of employees (International Congress and Convention Association, 2015). Furthermore, the MICE industry supports destinations' economic development because of the seasonal adjustments it can provide within the overall travel and tourism industry (Buathong and Lai, 2019). In fact, most MICE activity occurs during off-peak seasons, which in turn helps to support the development and maintenance of tourism infrastructure and facilities (Di, Di and In, 2016). Consequently, the growth of the MICE sector has had a significant economic influence in many host destinations, and this also

enhances the growth of the overall travel and tourism sector (Krip and Taweepornpatomkul, 2018).

The MICE industry provides an opportunity for many destinations to enter the lucrative MICE market by implementing marketing initiatives to attract both domestic and international MICE travellers. There are substantial direct and indirect effects of MICE or business tourism. For example, it creates jobs for residents, which improves positive social, cultural, and economic benefits for the host destinations. The World Travel & Tourism Council reports that in 2017, the travel and tourism sector accounted for 10.4% of global GDP and 313 million jobs or 9.9% of total employment. At its best, the travel industry provides critical economic, environmental, and sociocultural value. The report also shows that Asia was the largest market in terms of business event participants. Business events participants by region hosted a global total of 482.7 million participants, of which Asia hosted nearly one-third. Western Europe ranked second, hosting 444.4 million participants (29.2% of worldwide participants) in 2017. North America ranked third with 329.7 million participants (21.7% of global participants) and Latin America & the Caribbean, Africa, Central and Eastern Europe, and the Middle East followed, each hosting fewer than 100 million business event participants. Furthermore, it is claimed that the MICE traveller benefits the wider economy of the community, as they spend more than other tourist groups, reduce seasonality, contribute to the regeneration of destinations, spread knowledge and enhance innovation and creativity (Reeve, 2014).

The wide expansion of the MICE industry led to growing competition within the sector at both national and international levels, requiring new management and organizational techniques (Gardini and Bernini, 2008). National and regional governments have recognized the importance of investment in the MICE sector. For example, in Thailand, the national government and the Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB) have a strategic masterplan to support continued growth and the development of the MICE industry in Thailand (Tunming et al., 2019). In particular, TCEB have identified five major cities in Thailand where MICE growth is to be prioritized. However, despite this strategic prioritization of the MICE industry, it is not immediately clear what factors influence MICE destination selection, and thus

how governments could usefully direct planning resources for improvement towards.

1.2 Problem justification

The MICE industry has been globally recognized for its economic contribution to the tourism industry and its growth potential (Wu and Weber, 2005). However, there remains a lack of strategic planning guidance for the sector as a whole (Pergelova and Angulo Ruiz, 2011). Under increased pressure from global competitors, both public and private tourism sectors have sought ways to improve their products and services. In Thailand, for example, the MICE industry in the country has been growing rapidly, bringing significant economic benefits to the country (see section 1.2.1). As a result of the overall appeal of this sector and its contribution to the tourism industry more broadly, new approaches have been called for to achieve growth and development within the tourism industry (Pergelova and Angulo Ruiz, 2011). Approaches such as the prioritization of the MICE sector in Thailand, are noted as playing an essential role in the economic and social development of destinations (Karloef and Oestblom, 1993).

Previous strategies for appealing to MICE travellers, however, fail to account for significant competition, economic cycles, new technology and new generations with new demands, as well as a lack of consistent research methodologies to provide accurate information on MICE markets and factors influencing the development of the sector (UNWTO, 2014). As such, the UNWTO supports the idea that the strategies and models that destinations have adopted in the Asia Pacific to attract MICE travellers during the last twenty years should be reviewed. Ultimately, revisions to such policies must aim to address the problem of poor-quality infrastructure as a important factor for influencing destination and site selection. This thesis sets out to determine the significance of this aspect in relation to destination site selection and how destination benchmarking practices may serve as a tool for addressing such problems.

Despite increased interest in business tourism, factors relating to competitiveness and its determinants are generally under-researched (Kozak and Rimmington, 1999). Benchmarking, as applied to tourism destinations, has

shed some light on the structure of tourism destinations' competitiveness and has promoted a more holistic understanding of competitiveness by incorporating a diversity of factors. The strategic positioning and marketing analysis of destinations is increasingly recognized as necessary in the competitiveness of a tourism destination (Hudson, Ritchie, and Timur, 2010).

However, there are still few studies that attend to different contexts, and most research attempts to examine competitiveness in a vacuum, without stipulating a specific context (Mazanec, Wober and Zins, 2007). The concepts of competitiveness and benchmarking are strongly related, and according to Kozak and Rimmington (1999), can only be appropriately evaluated against known competitors, thus making it essential to identify which destinations are considered as competitors when developing destination management strategies and plans. As such, this thesis aims to take up this call for a more situated understanding of destination competitiveness vis-à-vis destination benchmarking practices, and further broaden the international applicability of such practices. However, due to the unique nature of various destinations and the complexity of the industry, Xiang et al. (2007) note that certain sets of conditions must be satisfied in order to ensure successful benchmarking. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to develop further the concept of MICE destinations and to assess the usefulness of destination benchmarking within this context. The results of this study will provide a greater understanding of the characteristics of MICE destinations when assessing destination performance and, subsequently, will be useful in the development of destination strategic planning.

Determining best practice in a MICE destination is difficult because of the diversity within the industry. Moreover, the identification of best practice or benchmarking standards that are universally applicable across the entire MICE sector has been under-researched to date. Therefore, the current study attempts to adopt an existing framework, and test its replicability and scope for refinement within an international context. Specifically, the BESTBET framework (Haven-Tang, Jones and Webb, 2006) is proposed to assess the usefulness of destination benchmarking and best practice standards for MICE destinations in Thailand.

There are several reasons why the BESTBET framework was chosen for this study. Firstly, the BESTBET project was developed under a similar political context to the current situation in Thailand. BESTBET was designed to promote best practice within business and event tourism in south-east Wales as a means of underpinning two of the regional tourism authorities' five strategic market propositions. The project covered four unitary authority areas in south-east Wales, namely Cardiff, Newport, Monmouthshire and the Vale of Glamorgan. Furthermore, the BESTBET project aimed to establish best practice in business and event tourism, demonstrate the value of working in partnership, and gather data on skills needed to develop staff involved in business and event tourism in south-east Wales. Seven factors were identified in the study: leadership, networking, branding, skills, ambassadors, infrastructure, and bidding (see section 4.2 for more detailed explanation). The aims of the BESTBET project align well with the strategic masterplan of the TCEB and Thai government, which aims to support continued growth and the development of the MICE industry in Thailand. Secondly, the factors from the BESTBET framework are supported in a review of the extant literature, where it is found that some of the factors are extremely important in developing MICE destinations to enhance competitiveness, such as skills, infrastructure, high standard facilities, accessibility/transportation, and suitable venues (see sections 6.5). Consequently, and because the majority of existing literature is focused on destination competitiveness in a Western context, it was felt that examination of the BESTBET framework in non-Western context could provide insightful results and policy recommendations.

Lastly, the difference in management systems between the UK and Thailand make the adoption of the BESTBET framework useful for comparative purposes. In Thailand, managerial systems are centralized within TCEB, located in the country's capital, Bangkok. This means that the policy decision-making, as well as the aspects of communication, coordination, and funding, has been carried out centrally, which will have an impact on attempts to improve the provision for MICE travellers. Therefore, some factors from the BESTBET framework are interesting for evaluating the context of the MICE sector in Thailand, such as the bidding process, networking and leadership. Consequently, based on the BESTBET framework, it is envisaged that the

findings of this study will provide meaningful and tangible insights for the TCEB and other stakeholders in creating a policy and strategic plan for the MICE sector.

1.2.1 Context of Study: MICE Destinations in Thailand

The MICE industry in Thailand has developed dramatically recently with the growth of participants and the increase of related facilities, such as convention centres and hotels (Sangpikul and Kim, 2009). In 2016, Thailand had great success in attracting MICE events, with 1,273,465 international MICE visitors, generating US\$341.75 million. For the domestic MICE market, 901,690 domestic MICE visitors generated US\$2,291 million (TCEB, 2016). Additionally, in Thailand, MICE tourists are accepted as ‘quality’ visitors due to their higher levels of spend per person, generating two to four times more expenditure than other tourism segments (TCEB, 2006; Mureithi, 2016; CBI, 2014). As mentioned, the masterplan of the Thai government and the TCEB aims to attract more convention business and stimulate the tourism industry (TCEB, 2012), as well as promoting Thailand as a country located at the heart of Asia, with convention facilities, infrastructure and an unrivaled choice of destinations. The strategic plan aims to build competitive capacity in the MICE industry within the global marketplace, which involves three main tactics: attracting activities to the country, promotion strategies, and development strategies (TCEB, 2015). Therefore, five main cities or ‘MICE destinations’ were identified: Bangkok, Pattaya, Phuket, Chiang Mai, and Khon Kaen. This plan aims to increase both the domestic MICE market and the number of domestic MICE travellers, asking these cities to focus on issues such as the standard of service or skills required by the MICE destination. Each of the five MICE cities has unique characteristics: Pattaya is known as a city of sea, sun, fun and great nightlife; Phuket, the ‘pearl of the Andaman Sea’, has beautiful beaches with high natural biodiversity, good transport and a variety of accommodation; Chiang Mai is known as the ‘Rose of the North’ due to its cosmopolitan nature, moderate climate and thriving arts and culture (TCEB, 2012); and finally Khon Kaen is a popular destination for tourists seeking a rich culture and the traditional Thai way of life.

The MICE industry will not only bring money into the destination but also to other areas of the tourism industry, such as hotels, transportation services and souvenir shops (Sangpikul and Kim, 2009). Consequently, many different sectors and key players have an impact on developing a MICE city, and communication and a clear understanding of shared aims between stakeholders is needed (Yodsuwan, 2009). Since the five cities mentioned above were selected by TCEB as MICE destinations in Thailand, there has been little research on how these MICE cities will practically serve the MICE industry and MICE traveller, or indeed whether or not the concept of a ‘MICE destination’ has a sound conceptual or theoretical basis. Furthermore, little work has been done on how best to measure a MICE city’s performance in order to benchmark standards. Therefore, this study seeks to identify the essential factors to attend to when developing MICE cities, using Thailand as a test site, identifying best practice specific to MICE destinations by using the concept of destination benchmarking to compare these five MICE cities in Thailand. A benchmarking method that uses importance-performance comparison, gap identification, and changing management processes is adopted. Benchmarking, in general, is considered a useful tool to identify best practices and to measure features related to products and services (Watson, 1993). Until very recently, efforts to benchmark tourism have been confined to individual organizations, such as hotels, services, and tourist destinations (Štumpf et al., 2018). A review of the extant literature illustrates that applying benchmarking in the MICE industry is still in its infancy, even though governments such as Thailand are prioritizing investment in the sector, coupled with the fact that MICE or business tourists are one of the most dynamic segments in the hospitality industry (Gardini and Bernini, 2002).

1.3 Purpose and Objectives of the study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the role of destination competitiveness vis-à-vis destination benchmarking in the MICE sector. As a tool, destination benchmarking has been used widely to assess the relative competitiveness of destinations primarily within a specified geographical region (Kozak, 2004). This study however, aims to expand understanding of destination benchmarking by testing its relevance and usefulness within a specific sector of the tourism

industry, namely the MICE sector. Given the unique character of the MICE sector, particularly the interplay between host destinations, event organizers and event delegates or participants, this study aims to explore the possibility of developing destination benchmarking tools for this sector and assessing the impact this might have on destination branding and strategic decision-making.

1.4 Research Objectives

The following section sets out a number of objectives for this study. Despite the objectives holding a specific link to the Thai context, it is anticipated that findings of this study will have far-reaching implications for industry and policy-makers alike in other countries with cultural and geo-political similarities. The objectives of this study are:

1. To develop the conceptual logic of destination benchmarking for the MICE sector.
2. To critically evaluate the key factors that contribute to the destination benchmarking practice of MICE destinations in a non-Western context.
3. To assess the relevance and usefulness of destination benchmarking tools within the Thai tourism industry for MICE destinations.
4. To enhance understanding of ways to identify and improve additional factors and identify best practices in MICE destinations in Thailand.

1.5 Research Questions

1. Is destination benchmarking a useful strategic planning tool in the Thai MICE sector?
2. What factors are useful in developing destination benchmarking frameworks in the MICE sector of Thailand?
3. Do the factors included in existing destination benchmarking models apply to specific international contexts?
4. Can destination benchmarking enhance destination brands and positioning within the MICE sector?

Table 1.1 provides an alignment of the research questions with research objectives, as well as indicating under which phase of the research each research question was investigated.

Table 1.1 Research objectives and questions

| Research objective | Research question | Phase 1 | Phase 2 |
|---|---|---------|---------|
| To assess the relevance and usefulness of destination benchmarking tools within the Thai tourism industry for MICE destinations. | Is destination benchmarking a useful strategic planning tool in the Thai MICE sector? | √ | |
| To enhance understanding of ways to identify and improve additional factors and identify best practices in MICE destinations in Thailand. | Do the factors included in existing destination benchmarking models apply to specific international contexts? | √ | |
| To critically evaluate the key factors that contribute to the destination benchmarking practice of the MICE destinations in a non-Western context | What factors are useful in developing destination benchmarking frameworks in the MICE sector of Thailand? | | √ |
| To develop the conceptual logic of destination benchmarking for the MICE sector | Can destination benchmarking enhance destination brands and positioning within the MICE sector? | | √ |

1.6 Significance of the study

This study is one of very few that attempts to develop a conceptual logic of MICE destination benchmarking. It adopts an existing model in order to identify and measure salient factors in destination benchmarking in the MICE sector. Further, the study seeks to evaluate performance in these areas, as well as to identify priority areas for improvement. The limited existing research on destination benchmarking in the MICE sector means that findings from this study will make a significant contribution to knowledge in this area, as well as provide insights into cross-cultural and international application of destination benchmarking models for this particular sector. In addition to making a theoretical contribution to knowledge, this study will also have policy implications for national governments in determining their strategic tourism management plans for the future. As a result of this study taking place in Thailand, it is anticipated that findings will assist the Thai government and related associations in planning strategies for MICE destination development. Finally, the results could also provide indications for future research in other MICE destinations with similar cultural and geo-political contexts.

1.7 Structure of the Thesis

Chapter 1 has presented an overview of the study, established the research problem, and identified gaps that the study aims to address. A statement on the purpose of the study and research objectives has also been made. The chapter ended by highlighting the significance and contribution of the study.

Chapter 2 presents the concepts of the research by examining the nature of business tourism and providing definitions of business event tourism and MICE tourism. The cultural values related to tourism destinations in a developing country are then discussed. The chapter reviews the research associated with the MICE industry to date as well as examining key historical concepts and stakeholders. **Chapter 3** then provides an overview of destination competitiveness and the concept of benchmarking theory with a review of tourism and MICE destination literature, demonstrating that the study goes beyond this past research in diverse ways. The business and event tourism destination benchmarking framework adopted in the study is discussed in **Chapter 4**, which presents a combination of theoretical views and

methodological evaluations. It introduces the BESTBET model and explores how the framework is relevant and useful for international contexts. Furthermore, the use of importance-performance analysis (IPA) as a measurement tool in destination benchmarking is explained, together with the validity and readability of the IPA method.

Chapter 5 then presents an outline of the epistemological and theoretical perspectives of the research and justifies the chosen research design and methodology, based on the research problem and objectives. It explores the qualitative strategy applied in the first phase of the sequential mixed-methods methodology. The chapter elaborates on the qualitative and quantitative methods and sampling frames used, as well as the process of instrument design, data collection and data analysis. The chapter concludes with a discussion of research ethics and researcher reflexivity. Next, the findings from research phase 1 are presented in **Chapter 6**. This chapter presents the qualitative findings of the study, reporting on critical success factors based on the BESTBET model and others that emerged from the specific international context. The importance, context, situation and significance of each factor is presented and the findings provide an understanding of existing and potential aspects that need to be attended to in developing MICE destinations.

Chapter 7 presents the quantitative findings, which build upon the qualitative results of the study. The chapter details the results of the MICE destination benchmarking model, as well as presenting an analysis of the performance of each MICE city in Thailand. It identifies the priority factors that require intervention and resources needed to improve performance. The research then combines the findings from both qualitative and quantitative methodologies together, presented in **Chapter 8**. This chapter synthesises the contributions each phase of the study makes to understanding destination benchmarking in the MICE sector. The factors for prioritization are presented, alongside a comparison of each MICE city's performance against an assessment of overall MICE performance in Thailand. The usefulness of MICE destination benchmarking is also reviewed here.

Finally, **Chapter 9** outlines the conclusions of the study. It evaluates the study's results in relation to the research questions, highlighting the contribution of the findings to MICE destination benchmarking. It raises practical issues and

considerations, providing suggestions and recommendations to improve performance and enhance competitiveness. The chapter also underlines the study's contribution to knowledge and its usefulness to researchers, policy-makers and industry practitioners. It also evaluates the study's limitations and suggests possible directions for new research in the areas focused on in this study.

Chapter 2. MICE Tourism

2.1 Introduction

The chapter explains the characteristics of the tourism industry and business tourism as well as highlighting the distinction between MICE or business tourism and other types of tourism, and how they relate to one another. This chapter outlines the origins of MICE tourism, the important contribution of MICE tourism to a destination, and destination competitiveness.

2.2 Characteristics of Tourism

The tourism industry is often cited as the most rapidly growing industry globally with high economic impacts for destinations (Sharpley, 2002). However, defining any form of travel or tourism and separating it from other aspects of modernity is challenging, due to the complexity of the industry, which is deeply entrenched in almost every aspect of present-day life (Babu, 2008). When considering definitions of tourism and travel more broadly, it is pertinent to consider the structure of the tourism system, the purposes for which people travel and the type of experiences sought, for it is this combination of factors that encompasses both the supply and demand side of the tourism industry (Buhalis, 2000). The nature of tourism has been debated in the literature (Pansiri, 2009), but is generally held to include the movement of persons, a process of movements and activities (Holloway and Humphreys, 2012).

Some believe three aspects need to be defined: its 'product,' the boundaries of its activities, and the destination as a unit of analysis (Leiper, 2008; Mazanec et al. 2007; Buhalis 2000; Tribe and Snaith 1998), while others argue that tourism can be presumed to be a single industry rather than a set of industries (Cohen et al. 1992). Leiper (2008) notes that the intricacy of tourism make it hard to categorize activities as a single industry because it involves diverse commodities supplied by the collaborative effort of several industries. Some scholars argue, however, that tourism can be conceptualized and measured within unique boundaries, like other established industries (Smith and Richard, 1998). This study subscribes to the notion that any definition of tourism should consider a combination of products and blend various services together with a host of stakeholders engaging in the multiple interactions that ultimately

shape the competitiveness of a destination (Wöber & Fesenmaier, 2004; Mazanec et al., 2007; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). This perspective is adopted in recognition of the breadth and fluidity of the MICE sector and its position within the broader tourism system. It is with this understanding of the complex nature of tourism that discussion proceeds to consider the form of the tourism product.

2.3 The tourism product

Tourism has historically been defined as a mass-market product that sells different products, such as experiences, perceptions and feelings throughout the trip (French et al., 1995), highlighting the intangible rather than a physical characteristics of the product. Although definitions of tourism have evolved to include niche forms of tourism, Hall (2009) indicates that it is widely accepted that tourism is often related to a combination of individual tangible products. Individual elements of tourist products are not distinctive or unique, but rather unique groupings provide differentiation (Buhalis, 2000). Tourism products mix three different aspects: the tourism experience, the destination as the point of the consumptive expertise, and the individual products and services such as accommodation, transportation, restaurants, entertainment and leisure (Buhalis, 2000; Pearce, 1993; Mazanec et al., 2007; Tribe and Snaith, 1998). Through combining these aspects in different ways, either on behalf of the tourist through pre-arranged packages or by the tourist themselves, unique, unpredictable and often irreplaceable products are consumed. Recognition of these characteristics is important when considering the role of sub-sectors like the MICE sector (see section 2.5) and the relevance and usefulness of destination benchmarking frameworks for enhancing competitiveness (see Chapter 3).

Many tourism products are characterized by intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability, and perishability (Holloway & Humphreys, 2012). When tourists plan a trip, they consider several tangible aspects, but they are buying more than a simple collection of services, such as safety, hospitality, and entertainment. Middleton (2001) suggests that the intangibility of the product makes it difficult to sample before consumption. In addition, these features do not readily facilitate quality standards and assurance. Maintaining consistency in perceived service quality is a formidable task, therefore, in which the heterogeneity of services supplied by different people in the production and delivery processes

compounds inconsistencies and yet maintaining consistency is generally accepted to enhance value (Williams & Buswell, 2003). Services are produced and consumed at the same time, and tourism consumption is inseparable from the destination itself, thus highlighting the important role that the destination plays in delivering a high-quality product. Another characteristic of the tourism product is services that relate to commodities that cannot be preserved, and therefore cannot be stored if unused. The perishable nature of the product, as well as the time-based and spatial inseparability between production and consumption explains higher prices during peak seasons.

Services in the tourism system involve individual stakeholders, who offer an all-encompassing collection of diverse products and experiences in each destination, together with the components of the system's product, which can be brought together under the brand of the destination (Wang and Krakover, 2008). Tourists associate their travel experience with the destination as a whole, so product differentiation is perceived as the difference between destinations (Buhalis, 2000), rather than between individual, component parts of the tourism experience. Therefore, management and marketing activities between individual service providers and destinations may differ based on the extent of collaboration and coordination amongst individual stakeholders (Hardy and Beeton, 2001). While the marketing departments of individual service providers such as hotels, venues, and restaurants have a high degree of control and focus on their products and services, destinations may also look to destination management organizations (DMOs), destination management companies (DMCs) or convention and visitor bureaux (CVBs) to facilitate a more coordinated approach to marketing and promotion of a holistic tourism product (Wöber and Fesenmaier, 2004). These non-profit organizations act as leaders in developing the destination and indirectly influence most elements of the composite product within the destination (Woo and Ladkin, 2011). The importance of this strategic coordination role is highlighted later in the thesis, where the role of DMOs, DMCs and CVBs is discussed in relation to destination competitiveness, particularly in respect of destination brand positioning and promotion. The relationship between this and destination benchmarking is also discussed further (see section 3.8).

2.3.1 Tourism destinations

As alluded to in the previous section, the tourism product is impacted upon greatly by the destination. To understand the relevance and usefulness of destination benchmarking, consideration of the definition and conceptualization of the tourism destination is first needed. To assess the success of tourism destination development, the characteristics of that tourism destination need to be addressed. However, defining destinations is one of the most challenging tasks in the study of tourism, due to the variety of different types of destinations and their relative attractions (Mazanec et al., 2007; Bordas, 1994; Kozak and Rimmington, 1999; and Ritchie et al., 2003; Morgan, Pritchard and Piggott, 2003). Clare and Gunn (1994, p.24) define a destination as ‘a geographical area containing a critical mass of development that satisfies traveller objectives. Similarly, the destination is defined as a geographic area that attracts visitors and has an administrative boundary, ranging from the largest country in the world to the smallest city (Morrison, 2013). The author notes that states, provinces, territories, regions, countries, and cities within individual countries can also be considered destinations (Morrison, 2013). Bornhorst et al. (2010) support the definition of a tourism destination as a place that has a major attraction, with a political jurisdiction that provides visitors with a range of satisfying and memorable experiences. Further, Hu and Ritchie (1993) conceptualize a tourism destination as a bundle of tourism products and services. This can be explained as a cluster or a group of tourist attractions, facilities, infrastructure, and organizations concentrated in a limited geographic area, and where competition between clusters might occur (Bordas, 1994).

In support of this idea, Leiper (1995) states that the destination is where the most noticeable and dramatic consequences of competition occur. Therefore, to enhance competitive advantage, appropriate strategies such as special promotions, uniqueness, and specialization are necessary (Kozak, 2004), allowing for planning and developing as well as marketing and management (Howie, 2003). The management of a destination is challenging because it involves a complexity of stakeholders, all involved in the production of the final experience (Sautter and Leisen, 1999). Tourism is fundamentally different from other industries. Grounded in the preceding discussion, there are calls to

consider new competitiveness models in the study of tourism destinations more generally (see for example Buhalis, 2000; Leiper, 2008; Murdy and Pike, 2012). Further Heath (2003) observed that the rationale for developing a tourism destination competitive model is based on the nature of those destinations. The basis of such models is to be found in the extant generic literature on destination competitiveness (Crouch and Ritchie, 1997; Dwyer and Kim, 2003) and is covered more comprehensively in Chapter 3, as is tourism destination benchmarking, examined in the broader context of competitiveness (Kozak, 2002).

2.3.2 The relationship between business tourism and leisure tourism

The previous sections examine the nature and products of tourism in general, but there are, of course, different types of tourism. Getz argues that business tourism has the greatest impact economically, environmentally, and socially for many countries (Getz, 2008). Business tourism or MICE tourism has also been recognized as one of the most thriving areas, with more lucrative segments in the hospitality and tourism industry (Whitfield et al., 2014). This section outlines the distinctions and complementarities between business and leisure tourism, while section 2.4 deals with defining MICE tourism more specifically.

According to Table 2.1, tourism is a system involving a coalition of industries that offer a vast array of diverse experiences which, although broad in scope and complex in nature, underlines the distinctive nature of tourism competitiveness.

Table 2.1 Leisure tourism and business tourism (adapted from Davidson (2000))

| | Leisure tourism | Business tourism | Exceptions |
|--|---|--|---|
| Who pays? | The tourist | An employer or association | Self-employed business travellers pay for their trips |
| Who decides on the destination? | The tourist | The organizer or the meeting/incentive trip/conference/exhibition | Organizers will often take delegates' wishes into account |
| When do trips take places? | Usual holidays periods and weekends | All year round, Monday to Friday | July and August are avoided for significant events |
| Lead time | Holidays usually booked a few months in advance: short breaks of a few days | Some business trips must be made at short notice | Major conferences are scheduled many years in advance, while others may be at very short notice |
| Who travels? | Anyone with necessary time and money | Those whose work requires them to travel, or who are members of associations | Partners who are not on business may accompany others on business trips |
| What kind of destinations used? | All kind of coastal, city, mountain and countryside sites | Centred mainly on towns and cities in industrialized countries | Some meetings and training courses take place in remote rural locations and incentive destinations are much the same as for upmarket holidays |

Often, the terms 'business tourism' and 'MICE tourism' are used interchangeably, but it is important to recognize both the distinction and connection between these terms. Holloway and Humphreys (2012) describe business tourism as a movement of a person or persons away from their natural environment for business or work purposes, while Davidson (1994) defines the

business traveller as someone who travels for purposes related to their work, or who is working away from their usual place of employment for a short period. Neither of these definitions specify a minimum or maximum length of time for travellers to be absent from the usual environment for work purposes; they do not define 'work'; nor do they specify how much of the time spent away from home should be devoted to work in order to be classified as a 'business traveller'. To further complicate definitions, the International Congress Convention Association (ICCA) (2013) notes that the tourism industry can be divided into leisure tourism and business tourism and defined business tourism as people who travel in ways that related to work by attending meetings, congresses, exhibitions, business events, for incentive travel and corporate hospitality. In reality, there are many events that would not involve attendees engaging in work, and equally both incentive travel and corporate hospitality are unlikely to engage travellers in work-related activities for long periods, if at all.

Various other literature on business tourism describes it according to the scope of business activities. Haven-Tang, Jones and Webb (2007) state that business tourism consists of all trips related to a traveller's employment or business interest, such as exhibitions and trade fairs. Similarly, Hankinson (2005) cited business tourism as travel associated specifically with attendance at meetings, conferences and exhibitions. Importantly however, the ICCA notes that there is no standard used or universally accepted definition of business tourism (ICCA, 2013), as does the UNTWO (2013). That said, for the purposes of this study, the terms MICE tourism and business tourism are used interchangeably. Given the significant overlap in definitions and understandings, it is anticipated that similar overlaps will be found when examining the concept with industry respondents.

The business and leisure travellers differ in many ways, such as their motivation for the trip, their lifestyle and the nature of the trip itself (see section 2.4). However, there are also many links between business tourism and leisure tourism in terms of supply and demand. Leisure and business tourists share facilities such as transportation, accommodation, and bars, cafés, or restaurants. Moreover, business tourists become leisure tourists after their work is done, or meeting programs may include leisure activities (Swarbrooke and Horner,

2001). Figure 2.1 illustrates the products and services that the business and leisure groups share.

Figure 2.1 the supply side: business tourism and leisure tourism (Swarbrooke and Horner, 2001)

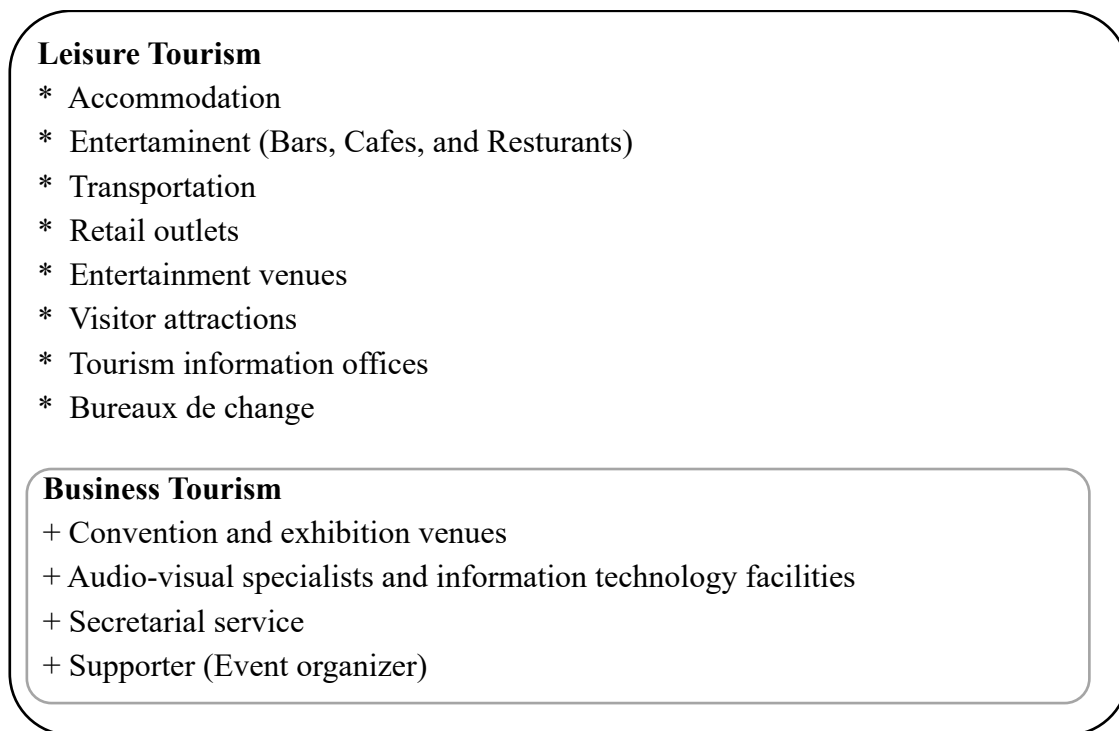


Figure 2.1 illustrates the inclusion of convention and exhibition venues as part of business tourism. At this point is important to note that business and event tourism are not the only terms used here, and that different geographical regions have been found to use different terminology. For example, in Europe, ‘business tourism’ or ‘business event’ is widely used, whereas in Canada the common term is ‘meetings, conventions and incentive travel’ (MC&IT). However, and rather problematically, there is a lack of consistent terminology used within the business and event tourism literature (Haven-Tang, Jones and Webb, 2006). Holloway and Humphreys (2012) define MICE or business travellers (interchangeably) as those that travel to engage in commercial activities. On some levels, the combining of business and event terms could, in part, be used interchangeably with MICE definitions (see sections 2.4 and 2.5). The MICE sector is usually associated with the provision of information to business,

usually for commercial advantage to all parties. Often, the instigating business gains from the dissemination of information, vendors or suppliers who may be in attendance gain from sales and the venue provider gains from the supply of facilities and/or accommodation (Harris and Jago, 2001). This, however, is not the only form of MICE tourism and it is important to note that there are different characteristics of of the consituent MICE sub-sectors (see section 2.5).

This study aims to develop a conceptual logic of destination benchmarking that focuses on the MICE (meeting, incentive, convention and exhibition) sector more broadly. The MICE sector is an important motivator of tourism and features prominently in the development and marketing plans of most destinations. Unsurprisingly, competition among MICE destinations is becoming more intense (Weber and Ladkin, 2003; Chubchuwong, 2019), and destinations must understand key success factors to establish themselves as competitive destinations (Go and Govers, 1999; Pergelova and Angulo Ruiz, 2011). However, study of the MICE sector is not new, as it has long emerged within several disciplines such as anthropology, geography, the economics of events, and of course tourism and hospitality. Getz (2008) observes that there is no real justification for considering MICE tourism as a separate field of study. Fig 2.2 shows the interrelationships occurring at the nexus of tourism and event studies, comprising of both marketing MICE to tourists and the development of MICE for tourism and economic development purposes.

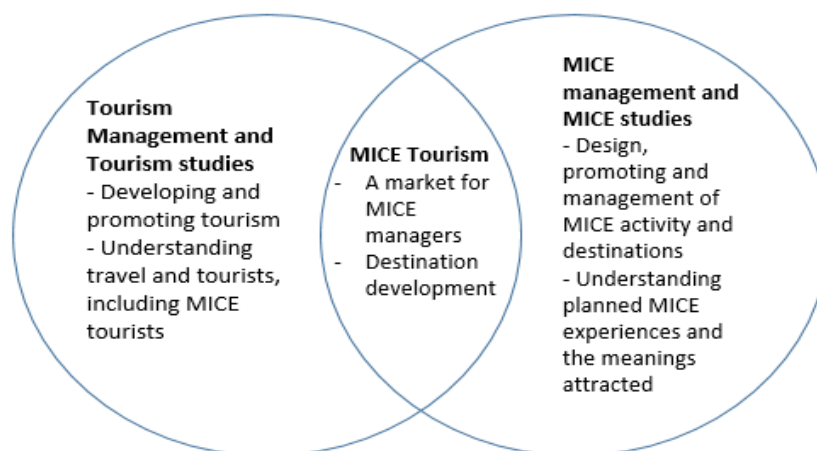


Fig. 2.2 MICE tourism at the nexus of tourism and MICE studies (adapted from Getz and Page (2008))

2.4 History of MICE tourism

The MICE industry is one of the most significant drivers in the tourism industry as well as for specific destinations (World Tourism Organization, 2012). Although the use of the MICE acronym is a relatively recent phenomenon, all four MICE activities have been a part of people's lives since the earliest recorded history. The business traveller is not a new phenomenon as people have been traveling for work for many years (Swarbrooke and Susan 2001). However, the subject has attracted only minimal attention from scholars until recent years. One of the first recorded examples took place between Henry VII travelling to France to sign a mutual nonaggression pact with the powers of Europe in 1518 (Matthews, 2007). Similar meetings and events have occurred throughout history in Greece, China, India, Egypt, and many Native American cultures. Business travel and tourism took off between 1750 and 1900 in European countries as humans attempted to transport their products and services (Matthews, 2007). The railways made these journeys faster than roads in Europe and the US was not far behind in this industrial development. Several key inventions in transportation helped to shape the meetings and conventions industry in the US (Swarbrooke and Horner, 2001). At the same time, the industry developed with innovations such as highways, air transportation and audio visual equipment (Carey, 2007). Not only has the demand for meetings and events increased, but planning has become more prominent, creating roles such as professional meeting and event planners (Fenich and Hashimoto, 2010). An increasing number of travellers with higher expectations required the industry to improve the quality of products and services.

As a consequence of international trade, professional associations have developed and shown great interest in bringing their members together at convenient locations. The US set up the first convention bureau in Detroit in 1896. Hotels promoted their city and region in addition to advertising their facilities for hosting conventions and meetings (Kaye Sung Chon, 2014). Since then, the MICE industry has grown due to both supply and demand factors, such as proper cooperation between public and private sectors and increasing need for interdepartmental and interregional meetings for multinational corporations and agencies (Yodsuwan, 2009). There are also elements that have supported

the growth of the tourism industry in general, such as increased income, better transportation systems, a higher propensity to travel, increased leisure time and improvements in technology (Davidson and Rogers, 2006). Many destinations around the world have invested heavily in the infrastructure and marketing necessary for the MICE industry (Davidson 2003). National and local convention bureaus actively promote destinations' facilities and other attributes that influence site selection (Webber 2002). These developments have further contributed blurred the lines between business and leisure travel. As noted earlier, historically the MICE sector has been confined to businesspeople and professionals, but now also includes individuals who gather to meet and exchange ideas at leisure events, sporting events, and hobby exhibitions (Falk and Pizam, 1991; Getz and Page, 2014). As a result there is a lack of an accepted and properly defined terminology for aspects of the MICE sector. While the acronym 'MICE' is in widespread use around the world including Thailand, 'business tourism' is widely used in Europe as the accepted generic term (Campiranon and Arcodia, 2008). Since the thesis has focused on Thailand, this thesis uses the term 'MICE'.

2.5 MICE Tourism in the Asia-Pacific region

During the last quarter of the twentieth century, the fast growth of the MICE industry in the Asia-pacific region helped it become recognized as one of the most attractive destinations for the MICE market (WTO, 2014). The MICE industry contributes significantly to the economic development of many regions, cities and countries (Crouch and Ritchie, 1998; Kim et al., 2003; Chiang, King and Nguyen, 2012). For example, countries in South Asia and East Asia have experienced the highest impact from growth, especially in economic terms (King and Nguyen, 2012). China had the highest number of MICE arrivals, followed by India (Chubchuwong, 2019). The majority of MICE travellers were from European countries with 109,000 arrivals from the UK and around 45,000 from the US (Chubchuwong, 2019). Of particular relevance to this thesis, the development of the MICE industry provided an excellent opportunity for Thailand to expand its MICE industry into those markets. The number of MICE travellers in Thailand has been growing steadily since 2010 (Chubchuwong, 2019). In 2016, statistics on the number of MICE travellers in

Thailand were as follows: meetings (20.3%), incentive travel (20.7%), conventions (23.4%), exhibitions (14.1%) and events (21.4%). The growth of the MICE segment has continued into 2018, when Thailand welcomed 34,267,307 international and domestic MICE travellers, which generated over US\$ 7,100,000 million for the country (TCEB, 2018). Consequently, the gross domestic product (GDP) of the country grew by 20.5% from the previous year, resulting in 4% expansion of Thailand's economy, which helped boost confidence among stakeholders to invest more money (TCEB, 2018). However, the country should be aware of the world's changing attitudes, which could affect the growth of the world economy in many aspects, such as climate change, innovation and technology development, security and safety in the digital age.

Therefore, in order to retain the impressive benefits of the MICE industry, TCEB has created a sustainable plan to improve the MICE industry in Thailand. The aim is to achieve stability, prosperity and sustainability by adhering to the nation's Sufficiency Economy Philosophy. The plan promotes knowledge and creates innovation and value in order to transform the country. Furthermore, it serves as a platform to exchange knowledge among MICE stakeholders, provide an opportunity to improve their capacity, innovation and develop related products and services. Moreover, the stakeholders in the MICE sector could also build networks of companies with similar interests and goals, which can lead to mutual collaboration and development in the future. However, achieving coordination among the stakeholders in both public and private sectors is challenging because it requires the development of new mechanisms and processes for incorporating the diverse elements of the MICE system (Jamal and Getz, 1995). A common problem in destination development is a lack of coordination and cohesion due to the highly fragmented nature of the industry (Yodsuwan, 2009).

2.6 The Constituent Parts of the MICE Sector

Chapter 1 noted that the MICE sector comprises four main activities: meetings, incentives, conferences and events/exhibitions. In general, MICE events involve attendees who share a common interest and gather in a pre-arranged venue (Dwyer and Forsyth, 1997). However, the different subsections of the MICE sector have quite different characteristics, described below. These distinctions

are important in understanding the usefulness of MICE destination benchmarking and for further refining the focus of this study (see Chapter 3).

2.6.1 Meetings

The World Tourism Organization (2014) stated that this term refers to a gathering of four hours or longer with ten or more attendees and undertaken in a variety of formats and for many reasons. For Davidson, a meeting is:

An organized event which brings people together to discuss a topic of shared interest, it may be commercial or non-commercial. Maybe attended by half a dozen people or many hundreds, it may last from a few hours to a week. However, the essential characteristic which makes a meeting qualify as part of business tourism is that it engages some of the services of the tourism industry, and this usually means being away from the premises of the organization running it. (Davidson, 1994, p.21)

This definition demonstrates that meetings could be categorized into several groups depending on many factors, such as the size of the meeting, places, formal or informal, and time duration. Understanding the context of a meeting could assist event planners and stakeholders to plan an event and understand the requirements or standard needs of those attending. Fenich (2005) defines a meeting as a gathering at which an attendee may attend educational sessions, participate in discussion and networkin, while Whitfield and Webber (2011) attempted to define a meeting as the event that has been planned with details such as place, time and topics, with the aim to create ideas and agreements. Likewise, a meeting might be considered a gathering at which individual people debate an agreed topic (Goldblatt and Nelson, 2001).

As mentioned, a meeting could be arranged in the workplace, especially an internal meeting. Therefore, an official meeting requires employees of specific corporations to travel off-site. The cost of such trips, including accommodation, transportation, and meals, are usually met by the corporation (Bu, 2013). A meeting is, therefore, an opportunity for attendees to gain new knowledge and understanding of their own company as well as to share experiences across branches or engage in networking. The WTO (2014) indicates that the meetings sector can be a key driver of the tourism sector's

economic development and an important generator of income, employment, and investment.

2.6.2 Incentives

The incentives component of the MICE sector refers to leisure trips with a focus on pleasure and excitement, and may have little or no connection to business (TCEB, 2013). Incentive trips are related to the rest of the MICE categories because these travellers are usually businesspeople being rewarded with a trip having met specified targets or milestones in the course of their jobs (Bandhuseve et al., 2017). Thus, the trip itself is not work, but the reason for traveling is connected with the participant's working life. Incentives are a tool that an organization uses to motivate employees (Bu, 2013; Davidson, 2000). They may also be offered as rewards to business partners and/or include an educational element, such as conference-style sessions or team-building activities (Rogers, 2006). Incentives not only help to motivate people, but also enhance the self-image of those who win the reward (Assistant and Martin, 2016). A company might decide to send a high-performing employee to an exhibition in an exotic destination, giving that person the opportunity to gain new knowledge and experience, as well as sharing their ideas with new people. A company may benefit from using this technique in terms of the retention of the top performers in the company and increased loyalty among employees (Davidson, 2000).

2.6.3 Conventions

The terms conferences, conventions or congresses are commonly taken to all loosely mean 'a large meeting', although different interpretations have been given (Fenich et al., 2011). The Thailand Convention Exhibition Bureau (2013) highlights the term 'convention' as used interchangeably with 'conference' or 'congress', but the preferred term in Thailand is convention, and this term will be used in the thesis. Conventions are often held annually, calling for a more intensive social program, while conferences may last for several days ranging from hundreds to thousands of participants from around the world, accompanied by exhibitions, shows or other activities (Fenich and George, 2011). A congress

is similar to a conference, but a more common term in Europe compared to other parts of the world. Different authors interpret the term ‘convention’ in slightly different ways base on the primary activities of the event, such as a meeting that gathers people from different firms together (Chon and Weber, 2014) or an event that has the primary aim for attendees to participate in meetings/discussions, socialize, or for other purposes (TCEB, 2013).

2.6.4 Exhibitions

This is arguably the most important part of the MICE industry because it has the greatest influence on the economy of the host destination (Bandhuseveet et al., 2017). This is because the participants of an exhibition or event can be divided into buyers, suppliers, agencies and other industrial organizations (Marques and Santos, 2016), whereas other components of the MICE sector do not generally allow for such varied stakeholders. Therefore, an exhibition or event provides an opportunity to attract sellers to participate in exhibitions and create maximum sales and benefits (Huang, 2016). As in the other three sections in the MICE industry, the term ‘exhibition’ has different meanings in different parts of the world and may refer to fairs, trade shows, trade fairs and expos (Chen and Mo, 2012). Seekings and Farrer (1999) indicate that exhibitions may be included under the term ‘congress’ in the US (although in this study, as noted in section 2.6.3, congressional meetings are classified under ‘conventions’). An exhibition is an event in which the primary activity of the visitors is to visit the show. These events focus both on business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-customer (B2C) interactions (Fenich and Hashimoto, 2005). For example, an exhibition is an event that informs visitors about products and services (Davidson, 1994), thus acting as a place for buyers and sellers to trade, consider future sales and interact on a grand scale. All the terms used depending on the event and event organizers themselves. Exhibitions not only have the highest economic impact for exhibitors, but also usually create a high-quality level of products and services in terms of hotels, transportation, and catering (Davidson, 2003). Therefore, to improve the exhibition sector, the destination needs to meet both buyers’ and sellers’ needs.

2.7 Defining Stakeholders in the Tourism Industry

This section presents a contextual foundation for the research, providing an insight into the key role that stakeholder collaboration plays in tourism destination management. As section 2.1 explained, the tourism product is a composite of numerous services, composed of key players engaging in multiple interactions within a destination. The MICE industry has become professionalized and is increasingly attracting the involvement and support of the government and the corporate sector (Bandhuseve et al., 2017). To enhance competition in the industry, cooperation and teamwork among stakeholders is required. Stakeholder theory has become the mainstream of management literature across different disciplines after Freeman (1984, p.46) first pioneered stakeholder theory and defined a stakeholder as ‘any group or individual that affects or is affected by the achievement of organization objectives’. Since then, multiple views of the meaning of a stakeholder have emerged. Many previous studies have reviewed the key definitions of significant stakeholder groups in tourism (e.g. Freeman, 1984; Phillips and Adu, 1998; Woo and Ladkin, 2011; Sheehan and Ritchie, 2005; Bornhorst, Ritchie and Sheehan, 2010). Some studies prefer narrower frames that only reflect individual stakeholder attributes, while others prefer broader views that encompass the whole stakeholder network (Woo and Ladkin, 2011). Many studies of the MICE sector define a stakeholder as someone with the same competitive or cooperative spirit, following the lead of CVBs and DMOs to form a destination team (Morrison et al., 1998).

Several authors have adopted a broader definition of stakeholders in the tourism industry due to the complex and fragmented nature of the industry (Saarinen and Sarrinen, 2006). A destination contains an open system of multiple stakeholders in which the actions of one stakeholder may impact on others (Getz and Jamal, 1995). Yodsuwan (2009) claimed that policy-makers and competitors are key stakeholders of the tourism industry. Sautter and Leisen (1999) also support a broader interpretation of stakeholders as an individual or group that can affect or be affected by the tourism industry, within a particular market or community, and who has an interest in the planning and delivery of the tourism business.

Other studies attempt to give more specific definitions of stakeholders in a tourism management context. Various authors (e.g. Buhalis, 2000; Sheehan and Ritchie, 2005; Swarbrooke, 1999) identify a wide range of different groups and types of stakeholders in the travel and tourism industry. For instance, Sheehan and Ritchie propose a tourism stakeholder map, adapted from Freeman's (1984) original theory. The term includes residents, local authority or government, local businesses, tourists, national business chains, activist groups, tourism planners, and employees (Yodsuan, 2009). Understanding key players in a tourism destination is essential, and an important tool for tourism destination management. Therefore, this study decided to further investigate the key stakeholders in the MICE sector as they play an important role in promoting the destination experience.

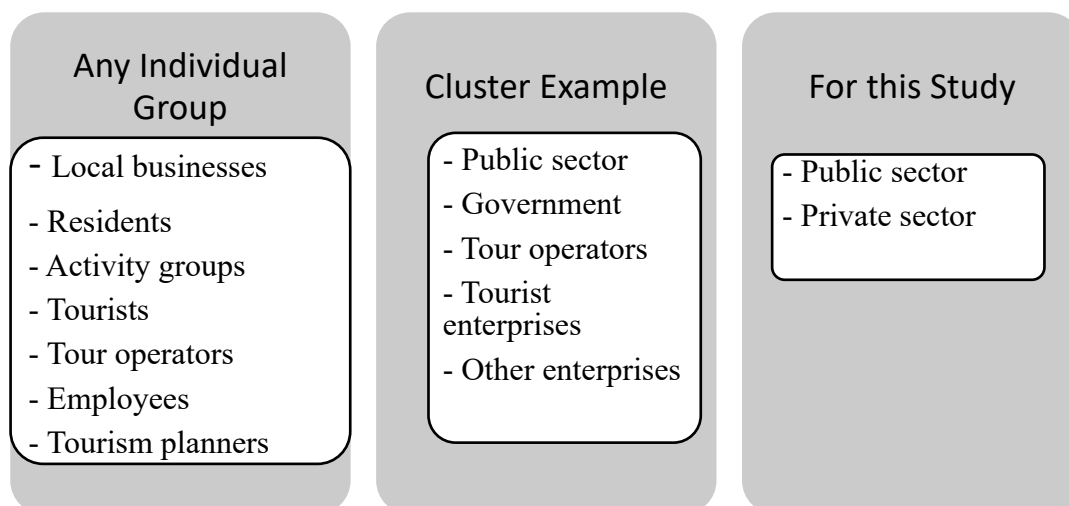
2.7.1 Defining Stakeholders in MICE industry

One of the challenging tasks for CVBs is to identify and manage different stakeholders with multiple interests due to the complex and fragmented nature of the MICE industry (Gretzel et al., 2006). As noted, the MICE industry is comprised of a diversity of elements such as hotels, convention centres, transport operators, attractions, venues, and event planners (Ladkin, 2006). The flow and mix of local products and services govern the MICE industry. The fragmentation of stakeholders and the complex web of their relationships necessitate CVBs to carefully select whom they pay attention to. However, a clear distinction between stakeholders' roles is necessary, even though identifying stakeholders and the social process is complicated (Woo and Ladkin, 2011). This has clear implications for destination management strategies and may prove to be influential in the destination competitiveness and destination benchmarking processes this study seeks to investigate.

Numerous studies have attempted to identify common groups of tourism stakeholders. Various authors (e.g. Buhalis, 2000; Bornhorst, Ritchie and Sheehan, 2010; Swarbrooke & Horner, 2001) identify a wide range of different groups and types of stakeholders in the travel and tourism industry. For instance, a stakeholder's map adapted from the original stakeholder theory has been proposed, including local businesses, residents, activist groups, tourists, national

business chains, competitors, government, employees, and tourism planners (Bornhorst, et al., 2010). Another approach is a dynamic wheel of tourism stakeholders developed by (McCabe, et al., 2000). The wheel is focused on the stakeholders involved in the process of planning and providing products and services for the convention and exhibition sectors. Further, Buhalis (2000) defines stakeholders as people who share the same interests, benefits and responsibilities of the destination, which includes the public sector and government, tour operators, tourism enterprises and Small and Medium Tourism Enterprises (SMTEs), the host population, and tourists. The definition of Buhalis (2000) is considered a suitable concept for this study. Morrison et al. (1998) observed that stakeholders in a MICE tourism context are similar to those of other tourism sectors, as each stakeholder in the MICE industry shares its competitive or cooperative spirit with the regional CVB to form a destination team. Stakeholders in MICE can prefer narrow frames that reflect individual stakeholder attributes, while others prefer broader views that involve a whole network (Woo and Ladkin, 2011). Therefore this study considers key stakeholders in MICE tourism as a whole range of people who work together and share collective goals, as suggested by Buhalis (2000). Figure 2.3 presents the three different groups of key stakeholders.

Fig 2.3 Key MICE Tourism Stakeholders



Morgan et al. (2003) state that the public sector and government agencies are significant stakeholders in any destination, as their role is to manage the infrastructure in the destination as well as its overall well-being. This idea is

supported by Paskaleva-Shapia (2001), who notes that governments have a responsibility to control the pressure of development, the quality of jobs, and the application of new technologies. On the other hand, the private sector also plays a significant role in tourism destination management, because the private sector provides most of the products and services for visitors (Simpson, 2008). Therefore, they have strong vested interests plus a broad knowledge base of the destination and its many products/services. Consequently, the focus of this study is on people involved in relevant areas, such as accommodation or hotels, convention venues, support services, exhibition service providers, professional conference organizers, incentive travel organizers and so forth. The public sector can include agencies from national, state, and local levels, and visitors' bureaux (CVBs). The characteristics, roles and responsibilities of each player are described in the next section.

2.7.2 Key MICE Tourism Stakeholder Roles

Stakeholder roles will vary according to a group's function or an individual's position within a group. Ritchie, and Hudson (2007) state that each stakeholder has a unique role. Robson and Robson (1996) argue that identifying stakeholders and the social process is complicated, while Sheehan and Ritchie (2005) insist that it is necessary to make a clear distinction between stakeholders' roles and what group they belong to.

2.7.3 Public sector

The public sector is responsible for managing the destination's infrastructure and the overall well-being of the destination. In the context of MICE tourism, the role and responsibilities of local government and the local tourism organizations should be emphasised.

Convention and Visitor Bureaux (CVBs)

According to the extant literature, competition among MICE destinations continues to intensify. In order to remain competitive, destinations need to effectively manage all components of the tourism system (Wang and Krakover, 2008). However, this is challenging, due to the complexity of the relationships between local stakeholders (Sautter and Leisen, 1999; Bornhorst, Ritchie and

Sheehan, 2010). Therefore, many destinations establish Convention and Visitor Bureaux (CVBs). CVBs represent an important element of the host location as they often act as destination marketing organizations (Morrison, Bruen and Anderson, 1998; Zhong & Morrison, 2015). The tasks CVBs perform for the MICE industry include providing a variety of information to meeting planners, as well as representing both their products and the destination (Weber and Ladkin, 2003).

The primary ambitions of CVBs are to develop an image that will position their area in the marketplace to attract MICE visitors (Gartrell, 1988). In a general sense, CVBs support meeting planners in various ways, such as providing information and knowledge about the product and destination, advising on site selection (transportation and local services), and recommending appropriate convention facilities (Getz, Anderson and Sheehan, 1998). For example, in Thailand the MICE industry is guided by the Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB). The TCEB is an official organization dedicated to the promotion of the MICE industry and was developed in recognition of Thailand becoming a destination of choice for international meetings, conventions, and exhibitions (Bandhuseve et al., 2017). The TCEB has been a key driver of the development of the MICE sector in Thailand since 2002 by Royal Decree.

2.7.4 Private sector

The private sector plays a major role in tourism destination management. A number of studies have highlighted the importance of the private sector as a key stakeholder, as the private sector provides most of the products and services for the tourist (Haven-Tang et al., 2007; Woo & Ladkin, 2011). Furthermore, private companies have strong vested interests plus a large knowledge base of the destination and its many products/services. The role of the private sector involves business-to-business dealings and relationships between public and private sectors to produce the best development (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000).

Destination Management Companies (DMCs): DMCs are professional services company that function as local experts in organizing gatherings and

events. DMCs possess extensive local knowledge and expertise in creative events based on a comprehensive knowledge of the destination and the needs of the incentive and motivation markets (Umesh, 2014). They specialize in the design and implementation of events, activities, tours, transportation, and program logistics, and their plans depend on their clients. The services that DMCs can offer include transportation in the area, onsite facilities and staff, and entertainment activities.

Professional Conference Organizers (PCOs): PCOs are organization that specialize in managing conferences, including logistics, activities, and interactions from beginning to end. PCOs may also supervise the meeting and conference committee, making decisions, ensuring that the project remains on schedule, coordinating the various suppliers and providing consultative expertise (McCabe, et al., 2000).

Conventions centres and venues: A venue is a place to hold and operate the convention or meeting (Davidson, 2000). There is a wide variety of places suitable for meetings large and small, including purpose-built, publicly-funded conference centres, theatres, museums and so forth. Often the venue provides accommodation and entertainment (Pavit Tansakul, 2008). Small to medium-sized meetings are increasingly likely to be hosted in a hotel because it is well suited to offer a package of in-house facilities (Davidson, 2000). Hotels are perhaps the best-known venues for meeting and conferences (Swarbrooke and Susan, 2001).

Transportation: this involves many operators, including air, rail, sea, coach, car hire, and taxi companies. The logistical aspects of coordinating these operators can be a significant consideration for conference organizers. Airlines are considered the most important service in business tourism as they handle both international and domestic delegates (McCabe et al., 2000). Tunming, Chaigasem and Siriwong (2019) found that developing logistics had a great impact on tourism, including integrated transport systems, human resource development, technology and innovation. Fluctuations in energy prices have a

direct effect on the initial costs of transportation in Khon Kaen, having severe impacts on both the private and governmental sectors.

Accommodation and hotels: Hotels can be both venues for events or simply places for a MICE traveller to sleep. Accommodation does not only refer to hotels: it could include cruise ships, youth hostels, self-catering complexes and so forth (Swarbrooke and Susan, 2001).

Service contractors: Service contractors provide the services element of the MICE section, comprising a range of businesses whose services include stand-fitting, stand design and construction, plant and equipment hire, the provision of light and power, security, and artwork. This is coordinated with the convention, meeting or exhibition organizers, be it a major exhibition or a small trade show supporting a conference. Exhibition service contractors play an important role in ensuring that stands are safe and comply with the regulations (Davidson, 2000).

Service support organizations: Service support organizations provide both direct and indirect support in the MICE industry. These diverse business could include audio visual companies, entertainment companies, florists, etc. (Pavit Tansakul, 2008).

Clearly, there are many players involved in the MICE industry, which might cause confusion. Each stakeholder has a perspective on their role, with which other stakeholders may not agree. Getz and Jamal (1995) and Reed (2000) suggest that conflict among stakeholders is often a result of complex interactions, differing values, perceptions, agendas, and interests. However, since those people share the same spirit and desired outcome, many authors agree that tourism destinations can be better managed and developed through stakeholder collaboration (Yuksel and Yuksel, 2003; Bornhorst, Ritchie and Sheehan, 2010).

2.8 The context of other current issues in Stakeholder Management

The previous section indicated that stakeholders both from private and public sectors in the MICE industry have unique roles. By way of adding further context to both the pre- and preceding discussions, especially because of the location-specific context of the study, it is necessary to identify some other factors relevant to stakeholder management, destination development and ultimately destination competitiveness. In the context of this section, development is used specifically to refer to development of a destination as becoming attractive as a MICE destination in line with the current TCEB strategy. It is not the purpose of this section to embark on a lengthy discussion of tourism destination development determinants in a general sense.

Enhancing both competitiveness and teamwork among stakeholders is vital, along with collaboration among stakeholders (Woo and Ladkin, 2011). However, successful stakeholder management is challenging and has several considerations. First of all, destination management should be managed to meet the destination's characteristics, which include economic, environmental and social-cultural fundamentals to ensure optimal gains for all stakeholders (Yodsuwan, 2009b). Therefore, TCEB as a leader of MICE in Thailand, together with local authorities in individual MICE cities have created different marketing campaigns for each destination (TCEB, 2018). Effective communication and collaboration are essential among the stakeholders in a destination. However, as previously mentioned, the management system in Thailand is a top-down system centralized by TCEB. This may lead to misunderstanding, missing information or lack of interest in improving the MICE industry, which in turn could affect the success of the MICE destination development. Fadeeva (2005) indicated that unclear or differently interpreted goals, lack of trust and/or missing information could affect the success of tourism destination management. This could be argued as true for Thailand too where most stakeholders take forward the policies of TCEB and in doing so may misinterpret goals or not have the required levels of information. Furthermore, the stakeholders do not hold much interest or commitment to improving the destination as they believe that TCEB is the leader who will continue to provide guidelines of improving the MICE destinations. Ladkin and Bertramini (2002) also point out that lack of interest or

commitment by stakeholders, or political traditions that favor centralization of authority, can create weak collaboration.

Cultural factors may also influence under-performance when developing a tourism destination, especially in a developing country. Tosun (2000) indicated that cultural factors such as the limited capacity of poor people to handle development effectively, apathy and low levels of awareness in the local community, may function as obstacles to the emergence and operationalization of a participatory tourism development approach. This may be true in Thailand, where the MICE industry is still new. Consequently, there are limited skills and experience, and capacity is still needed. Unsurprisingly, the business sector is more focused on developing their own products and services rather than considering the environment, or social and community matters. Oakley and Marsden (1984) indicated a limited capacity for destination development in the sense that people in an impoverished country may have a limited capacity to influence things that directly affect their dignity. In Thailand for example, stakeholders are often more focused on improving their own business rather than having concern for the environment. This is due largely to the fact that the MICE industry in Thailand is relatively new and as such businesses are more invested in improving their own products and services rather than focusing on more abstract goals. The same authors also highlight limitations in respect of host communities facing difficulty in accessing the services of a welfare state, such as hospitals and education. While the local authority in a destination focuses on serving organized groups such as civil servants and employed workers in the modern sectors of the economy, logically, those same people are more likely to wish to satisfy their basic needs rather than the socio-political issues of the wider community. Hence, fully participating in tourism destination development and associated social issues, which demands time and energy, might be difficult (Tosun, 2000). The results of Tosun's study could confirm the MICE destination development situation in Thailand.

Finally, apathy and low levels of awareness in the local community could also be an issue. Miller and Rein (1975) state that a lack of interest in and awareness of social-cultural, economic and political issues in developing countries is generally accepted. This may be because people lack confidence and belief that their idea will be considered, which may prevent them from

expressing their ideas or taking an interest (Rosener, 1982). The findings of this study may thus be affected by the perceptions of stakeholders of the industry. These considerations are especially pertinent when considering the adoption of frameworks typically developed from research in developed (Western) countries. Finally, the reflections of stakeholders on critical factors in the MICE industry in Thailand may in turn reflect their specific cultural values.

2.9 Research in MICE Tourism

In the last two decades, the MICE industry has grown rapidly. Meanwhile, numerous noteworthy studies were published. For instance, a framework for assessing tangible and intangible impacts of events and conventions was developed (Dwyer, Mellor and Mistillis, 2000). Since then a vast number of projects have studying the impact of this sector on the destination's economy. Getz and Page (2016) attempted to review studies in the MICE tourism area. As mentioned, MICE events have huge benefits for many destinations. Therefore, many cities have now put an effort into improving related facilities in order to attract more MICE travellers (Boo, Koh and Jones, 2008), as well as to up-sell and compete for events (Kim, Yoon and Kim, 2011).

There is some debate about the validity of including incentive tours in the MICE sector. Fenich (2005), for example, points out that MEEC (meetings, expositions, events, and conventions) seems more appropriate. Mair (2013; 2012) highlights that business tourism studies during 2000-2009 found it difficult to obtain adequate statistics on this part of the sector (also see Jin and Weber, 2013; Whitfield, Dieko, Webber and Zhang, 2014, Dipietro and Breiter, 2008). Some papers covered convention tourism research and convention management only (Yoo, 2005; Lee and Back, 2005), while others focused only on the exhibition section (e.g. Lee and Lee 2014).

Since 2004, a number of studies focused on the effects of business and events or MICE tourism industry on the economy. For instance, Weber and Ladkin, (2003; 2004; 2008) explored trends in the convention industry, including government's increasing awareness of its economic benefits. Jones and Li (2015) extended the Tourism Satellite Accounting (TSA) methodologies to a Meeting Satellite Account (MSA) approach, with the purpose of estimating

the direct economic impact of MICE activity in the UK in 2011. Furthermore, the economic value of business events or MICE tourism has been a popular subject, for example the economic value for a destination (e.g. Deng and Li, 2014; Wang and Yu, 2015), including at the city level (e.g., Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre, 2010), for rural areas Grado, Strauss and Lord, (1997) and Hanly (2012) for Ireland. Some researchers focused on the impacts of MICE in several aspects such as social and economic legacy by Foley et al., (2013) focusing on how business events promote knowledge diffusion, networking and new collaborations leading to innovation, and educational outcomes. These findings can affect awareness and profiling, showcasing and destination regulation, and offer a platform for intercultural understanding.

The aim of the journey for the MICE traveller might be more than just work or business and may relate to leisure tourism as well (Davidson 2003). The observation was confirmed by research in the UK that suggested that 40% of business travellers and their families or colleagues return to the host destination as leisure visitors in the future (Business Tourism Partnership, 2004). The motives and decision-making of business-event travellers have been frequently studied, such as for trade or consumer shows (Lee, Harris and Lyberger, 2010; Lee, Yeung and Dewald, 2010; Ramirez, Laing and Mair, 2013) and convention attendance (Mair and Thompson, 2009). Likewise, a number of studies focus on attendee decision-making satisfaction and loyalty as well as the motivations, inhibitors and facilitators or factors that might influence the intention to attend an event (e.g. Breiter and Milman, 2006; Mair and Thompson, 2009; Severt, Wang, Chen & Briter, 2007). Recent research includes a study of the millennial generation and what they want from meetings and events (Fenich et al., 2014). MICE tourism cannot happen without specific venues or destinations, but research on this topic has been limited.

Some scholars have attempted to explore the impacts of MICE tourism on cities, such as Nelson (2009) and Nelson, Baltin and Feighner (2012). Krugman and Wright (2007) discussed special considerations for realizing international business events, while Clark (2007) looked at the additional requirements imposed on cities once a convention centre has been built. MICE destination competitiveness was assessed by Wan (2011) in Macao and the competitiveness of the Italian convention industry was framed in the context of

clusters by Bernini (2009). Further, the topic of how meeting planners and stakeholders make decisions were considered by (e.g. Oppermann 1996; Jin and Weber, 2013). Events planners have been considered by Park, Wu, Ye, Morrison and Kong (2014), who specifically studied meeting-planner perceptions of Beijing as a destination. It should be noted that these previous studies have identified common factors that make destinations attractive, but failed to assess the level of importance and performance of destination attributes.

There has been far less research into MICE tourism destination image analysis, especially evaluation of MICE destinations' performance in order to remain competitive. Moreover, in the limited literature, more research has been focused on the destination location of the event itself as a unit of analysis, rather than on the host country. Furthermore, there is a lack of studies that benchmark the performance evaluation of MICE destinations. Likewise, even though the MICE industry in Thailand has a massive impact on the country, especially economically, there is little research exploring Thailand's MICE industry (Jurakanit and Taweepornpatomkul, 2019). Therefore, this study attempted to fill the gap by selecting the MICE industry in Thailand as a case study.

2.10 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a history of tourism and tourism products, as well as describing the characteristics of the MICE industry. Definitions of stakeholders in the MICE industry, as well various supporting organizations and providers, have been provided. The literature related to business tourism and/or MICE tourism has also been discussed. The next chapter will provide a theoretical view of destination benchmarking and indicate its application for the current study.

Chapter 3. MICE Destination Benchmarking

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter described the nature of tourism in terms of tourism products and tourism destinations, and the link between leisure tourism and business tourism. The literature review suggests that benchmarking theory could be used to develop a MICE destination benchmarking tool. This chapter aims to review several definitions of the concept of benchmarking, and the relevant forms of benchmarking in the tourism industry in general, and MICE in particular. The limitations of benchmarking in tourism and MICE industry are addressed and the application of benchmarking in the study-specific context is illustrated in the final section.

3.2. Overview of Benchmarking Theory

Product quality and feature comparisons were used before the term 'benchmarking' started to be used widely (Camp, 1989). Consideration of benchmarking as a tool for improving product and service quality began in the 1950s. Japanese businesses were visiting their Western counterparts in order to compare their technology and business practices (Bendell, Boulter and Kelly, 1993). Since then, benchmarking techniques have been a popular tool for quality management, helping managers to think about more innovative ways to improve performance. Competitiveness between business products and the tourism industry has increased as customers' requirements continue to change rapidly. In order to meet customers' expectations, businesses have to continue to develop by looking at best practice and applying it to their own business (Stapenhurst, 2009). A review of benchmarking literature shows that many benchmarking methodologies perform the same functions as performance gap analysis (e.g. Camp, 1989; Kozak, 2004; Gardini and Bernini, 2002; Mazanec, Wober and Zins, 2007; Blancas et al., 2018; Blackstock, Scott, White & McCrum, 2006). Benchmarking is a powerful tool as it can be applied to virtually every function in an organization in many creative ways. The benchmarking method is firstly to identify performance gaps of products and services within an organization before deciding which development methods to adopt in order to fill the gap.

Therefore, comparison and competitive analysis are features of the benchmarking theory (Kozak, 2004a).

Another approach to benchmarking is as a tool that helps a business set and refine strategy in a dynamic market. Benchmarking gives us the ability to see things differently, as is necessary for companies engaged in re-engineering their procedures and policy. For instance, Min and Chung (2002) state that benchmarking could assist a hotel to create a marketing strategy and improve the quality of their service. Further, Bogan and Michael (1994) point out that benchmarking helps a business to set their strategic plan and goals by reviewing products, prices, practices, strategies, structure, and services provided by competitors. This can validate their own business goals. Therefore, benchmarking can be considered as a way for one business to learn from others (Bogan and Michael, 1994).

Benchmarking is used for more than just comparison activities: it also creates an opportunity to enhance competitiveness. Comparison is only one stage of the benchmarking process to identify a gap (Jackson, Safford and Swart, 1994). The literature suggests that the comparative and competitive paradigms together offer a better approach to understanding and improving competitiveness. Lall (2001, p.1505) asserts that ‘if this integration is done well, with a sound framework, appropriate empirical analysis, and a good grasp of governance issues, it can serve as a valuable tool of policy.

3.3 Benchmarking definitions

Benchmarking theory is an indicator system for evaluating and identifying best practice in business, initially used in manufacturing and related to what constitutes best practice and what factors make this a successful approach (Bogetoft, 2012). Benchmarking is used by a variety of national and international businesses to improve their performance. Despite many different definitions of benchmarking given by numerous organizations and authors, the most broadly accepted definition of benchmarking arose at the end of the 1980s, as coined by Robert and Camp (1980) who defined benchmarking as the continuous process of measuring products, services, and practices against the fiercest competitors or companies accepted as leaders in a particular industry.

Benchmarking in management studies is usually positioned as an extension of existing total quality and is used to establish new, more relevant standards of performance (Wöber, 2002). Benchmarking has also been described as an evaluation system that helps to continually improve the products and services by comparing a work process of an organization with the best practice (Spendolini, 1992). Watson (1993) states that there are three parts to benchmarking theory: maintaining quality, customer satisfaction, and the process of seeking good practice. Kozak (2004), however, points out that benchmarking is built upon performance comparison, gap identification, and changes in the management process. The underlying principle is to identify a performance gap, but benchmarking is also used to measure operational and management performance to find best practice within similar businesses and services (Walleck, O'Halloran and Leader, 1991).

Benchmarking techniques have now been applied in several tourism fields. For instance, benchmarking has been undertaken in relation to customer satisfaction, capital investment, occupancy rates of hotels, measuring and improving the performance of tourist destinations, productivity in tourism and hotels, operation improvements, and financial savings (Luu, Kim and Huynh, 2008; Yang and Lu, 2016; Kozak and Nield, 2004; Hwang and Lockwood, 2006). Benchmarking was first covered by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Tourism Committee in the early 1990s, involving the National Tourism Administration (NTA) and National Tourism Organizations (NTOs), but was addressed in greater depth by the World Tourism Organization (WTO) from 1990 (WTO, 1994, 1996, 2000, and 2003).

Benchmarking should be carried out through regular site visits and interviews, evaluation of results, and later, the development of the business based on the recommendations and their implementation (Garvin, 1993). Benchmarking methods have been used broadly in the tourism context in many countries (Fesenmaier and Leppers, 1999). Further, Gardini and Bernini (2002) identified benchmarking as a method that allows identifying best practice and performance measurement, which could apply to develop a specific indicator to monitoring performance and create an improvement plan. Thus, benchmarking helps an organization to realize their strengths and weaknesses and how to

satisfy their customers better by learning from others. Table 3.1 illustrates different definitions of benchmarking.

Table 3.1: Benchmarking characteristics (Luque-Marínez, Teodoro Muñoz-Leiva, and Francisco, 2005)

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Identification | IDENTIFY BEST PRACTICE IN THE SAME SECTOR AND WHAT MAKES THE BEST PRACTICE EXCELLENT. CATEGORIZE WHAT IS THE KEY TO ACHIEVE BETTER RESULTS AND WHAT TO BENCHMARK |
| Knowledge | A process to evaluate the products and activities of best practice |
| Adaptation | Implementation (in a tactical context) of what has been learned |
| Arrangement | Information is collected and analysed, and then used to make a plan for new strategies |
| Continuity | Revision and repetition as an ideal for improvement if necessary after finding that the isolated problem has been solved quickly, or improving the action. |

3.4 Types of benchmarking

There is no doubt that benchmarking is a useful way to learn from other organizations on how to improve one's business (Cano et al., 2001). Benchmarking includes broad categories, namely strategic benchmarking, process benchmarking, and statistical benchmarking (Bogan and Michael, 1994). Camp (1989) has divided benchmarking into four main categories: generic, functional, competitive, and internal benchmarking. On the other hand, Zairi (1993) and Kozak (2002) divided benchmarking into two categories, internal and external. Internal benchmarking could be considered a form of functional benchmarking as it covers two-way communication, sharing opinions about the projects or activities between departments in the same company or chain in different countries (Cross and Leonard, 1994). Once any part of the organization improves its performance, it can indicate to others how this was achieved. This view is supported by Breiter and Klein (1995), who agree that internal benchmarking should be the starting point of the process as it requires the organization to examine itself, and also provides a baseline for future comparison with partners who have the same standards, culture and systems, making it easy to access data. However, there is a disadvantage of this form of

benchmarking in terms of time, because competitors could be busy increasing their market share while an organization is preoccupied with measuring itself (Cook, 1997).

External benchmarking refers to comparative and competitive benchmarking, a form of benchmarking that attempts to seek the best practice by comparing business performance not only against competitors, but also against the best businesses regardless of sector or location (Breiter and Klein, 1995). Kozak (2004, p.98) describes external benchmarking for tourism destination as intended to 'to benchmark our performance levels against those of other competitive destinations in order to seek better practices and to gain high performance levels with a higher level of service quality'. External benchmarking is focused on the objectives and strategy of others, can take a long time and is not easy to achieve, as it is challenging to foster active collaboration and cooperation with direct competitors (Azzopardi, 2011). However, Mazanec, Wober and Zins (2007) observed that cooperation between competitors could be very fruitful for all parties.

From a tourism perspective, when considering destination management as a complex process, organizations could perform both internal and external benchmarking, evaluating in both quantitative and qualitative terms. Measuring hard data or the quantitative performance of a destination could look at data of visitors and revenue from tourism, while soft or qualitative data could consider what most tourists like and what they dislike, their positive or negative views and their experience compared with that of other destinations (Kozak, 2002). In destination benchmarking, both qualitative and quantitative methods can be used, but it is exceptionally complicated to gather the data for benchmarking on a national or higher level. This may be why recent studies aimed at benchmarking exist on the national level for very few countries (Assaf, Josiassen and Cvelbar, 2012) or regions (Blancas, Oyola, González & Caballero, 2018; Khazai, Mahdavian & Platt, 2017; Kozak, 2002; Štumpf, Vojtko and Valtrová, 2018). The current study aims to undertake benchmarking at the regional level, seeking to determine the cross-cultural applicability of existing destination benchmarking models in an international setting.

3.5 The benchmarking process

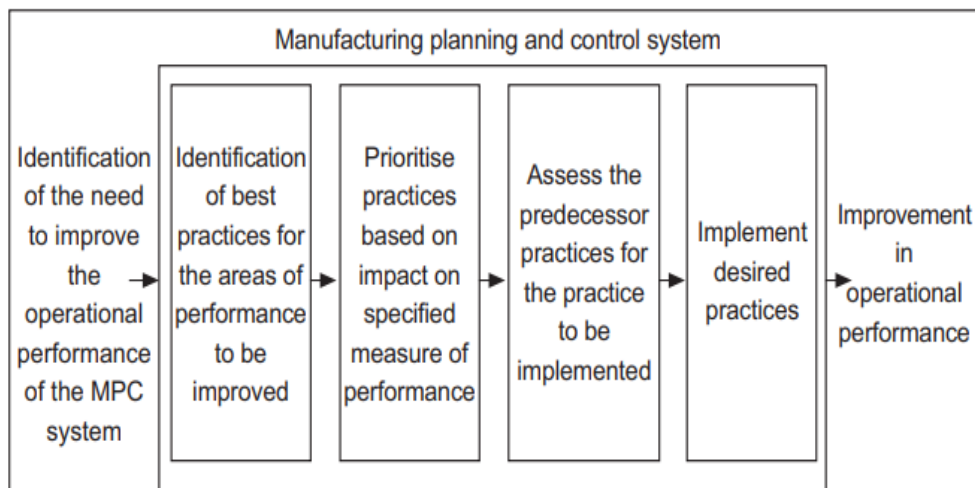
There is a lack of standardization in benchmarking processes. Each manager or organization is likely to establish a model that suits their business. Cano, Drummond and Mille (2001) examined benchmarking as a process of managing change, which should follow four steps: assess your performance to seek out strength and weakness, identify areas for improvement, plan by looking at best practice, and implement and evaluate specific actions. The four steps seem a simple process but there is no guarantee of the results as it does not include a monitoring process. Therefore, an alternative benchmarking model from the telecommunication industry was developed which included a five-step process: decide what to benchmark, find the companies to benchmark, gather data, analyze data and integrate results into action plans, then recalibrate and repeat the process (Bogan and Michael, 1994).

Similarly, Gardini and Bernini (2002) applied four steps of benchmarking an international conference centre: they defined a benchmark goal, collected and analyzed data, and then reported and integrated the results. Min, Min and Chung (2002) note four steps: identify and prioritize service attributes, develop service metrics and performance standards, identify the best-practice then compare to identify the gaps and develop a strategic action plan. Further, benchmarking theory has been applied to evaluate the performance of a tradeshow by Tafesse, Korneliussen and Skallerud (2010). The study conducted IPA to analyzed considers exhibitors' performance expectations and perceived performance to evaluate and benchmark trade show performance. The research also discusses the normative and theoretical implications of the proposed method. As well, the findings confirmed that Importance Performance Analysis (IPA) can be used for benchmarking by randomly selecting one exhibitor and comparing its performance against the performance of others.

Other studies have adopted different benchmarking models and/or developed their own, such as the Data Envelopment Analysis (DEA) model, which has been used to assess hotel operational performance (e.g. Wu, Liang and Song, 2010; Hsieh and Lin, 2010; Barros and Dieke, 2008). On the other hand, many studies attempted to develop their own benchmarking model. For example, Lee (2002) developed a generic model for assessing, implementing and sustaining business excellence through a structured approach, implementing

best practices in TQM (such as in operations, quality, customer satisfaction, etc.). Likewise, a framework for identifying best practices and leadership was developed by Davies and Kochhar (2000). The authors developed a conceptual framework to indicate how best practices can be selected to maximize performance improvement. Figure 3.1 illustrates the framework, starting from identification of the need to improve the operational performance of the MPC system. The need to improve can be strategy-driven, identified through the use of benchmarks, or highlighted by the occurrence of problems. This need or objective should be reflected in the measure of performance and monitoring of change. The framework specifies, for defined measures of performance, a list of best practices influencing each measure, classified by strength and the nature of the relationship between practices and performance, and dependency relationships between practices. The framework could assist operational managers to focus on the right objectives, to minimise fire-fighting.

Fig 3.1 Conceptual framework for selecting best practices to improve operational performance (Davies & Kochhar, 2000)



According to the above literature, there is, therefore, no standard benchmarking process. Each organization creates its own benchmarking model that is best suited to them. However, to design a benchmarking process model, a business should confirm that they have picked the right factors to benchmark. Bogan and Michael (1994) suggest that an organization adapt and revise the benchmarking process to support cultural differences among organizations. Each corporation has a different character, which might be dominated by people from different

backgrounds (e.g. those from sales or marketing backgrounds may prefer less structured management procedures). These organizations will probably promote a more straightforward benchmarking process that reflects their preference for flexibility and individuality (Bogan and Michael, 1994). The ways in which this has been adopted in a tourism context are outlined in section 2.4.

In summary, each organization should endeavour to create its own model to meet their needs, problems, strategy, products, and services, provided the process still follows the main steps i.e. planning, data collection, analysis and review (Camp, 1989).

3.6 Destination Benchmarking

Chapter 2 discussed the nature of tourism, the tourism product and what is meant by a tourism destination. The term ‘destination’ has been defined as equivalent to terms such as ‘destination area’ or ‘tourism community’ (Busuioc and Andrei, 2013). This study adopted the definition of destination benchmarking provided by Kozak (2004), as the continuous measurement of the performance of tourist destinations (strengths and weakness) not only against itself or other destinations in the same or in a different country, but also against national/international quality grading systems by assessing both primary and secondary data. The aim of this study is to develop the conceptual logic of destination benchmarking for the MICE sector, adopted from the existing benchmarking framework, and to evaluate MICE destinations’ performance as well as to identify priority factors that need to be attended to in order to develop MICE cities in Thailand.

As noted, destinations are accepted as a key component of the tourism system as they play a pivotal role in the industry as the tourism product (Petr et al., 2018). Competition among tourism destinations continues to (Petr et al., 2018). This may benefit destinations, motivating them to provide better products and services that meet tourists’ expectations. Visitors’ attitudes are essential information when attempting to identify critical success factors to enhance destination competitiveness. Benchmarking is a method of driving organizations towards competitive advantage, since it helps to evaluate the performance of an organization and compare with others (Wu, Liang and Song, 2010). However, there are some different aspects of organization and destination benchmarking.

Destination benchmarking provides a broader picture that includes all elements of a single destination, such as transportation, accommodation, and residents' attitudes (Kozak, 2004). Destination benchmarking helps planners to improve their performance (Petr et al., 2018). The principle of using benchmarking in tourism has been broadly accepted and applied in many countries in critical areas. For instance, situational analysis, competitive destination reviews, improvement planning, and adoption of best practice and identification of essential factors of success for their products and services (Tafesse et al., 2010). Benchmarking the performance of a tourism destination means using quantitative measures, such as the number of visitors, net income from the industry and percentage of local people in tourism-related employment (Seaton, 1996), but there are also other relevant factors such as weather, destination target demographics and competition (Kozak, 2002). Therefore, recently, the methodology of benchmarking has been adapting to cover more relevant factors and develop a measurable quality standard of the individual destination before comparing the performance of that destination with others.

3.7 Benchmarking as a tourism destination competitiveness tool

The World Economic Forum (WEF, 2002) provides a comprehensive definition of competitiveness, which has gained significant acceptance in many studies. It highlights the need for industries to thrive in the face of international competition without resorting to protectionist measures, subsidies, or cheap labour. While some conceptualizations focus on structural factors, affecting long-term economic performance, and are concerned with productivity, skills, and innovation, Fagerberg and Verspagen (1996) view competitiveness as a real exchange problem measured by the relative cost guides expressed in a common currency. The definitions highlight various salient characteristics and outcomes of a competitive economy, but an explanation of what leads to competitiveness is needed. Ritchie and Crouch (2003, p.12) define competitiveness in the tourism destination context as, 'the ability of entrepreneurs to design, produce and market goods and services, the prices and non-price'. Unless these definitions are linked with performance in a cause-effect relationship, broad conceptualisations serve little purpose.

According to the literature review, we could define competitiveness from two different perspectives. The first is a micro view that focuses on the business and the industry as a centre of the competitive analysis. Therefore, international competitiveness is more narrowly related to commercial creativity, knowledge capacity, and human development (Crouch and Ritchie, 1999). Porter (1990) and Spender (1998) state that the heart of micro competitiveness is a business risk-oriented culture that creates new products, organizations and industries, allowing the manipulation of knowledgeable capital and technological accretion in innovative ways. The studies also confirmed that factors such as size, structure, competencies, strategies, and resources could be used to determine a firm's competitiveness. On the other hand, a macro view of competitiveness puts the nation at the centre of the analysis. The yield of a nation is shaped by the political, cultural, social, and economic environment (Krugman, 1994). Therefore, the income per capita, employment, direct and indirect investment, and other factors that significantly impact on the performance of the economy are measured (Porter, 1990). However, the two methods are interdependent and complementary; only their corresponding analytical framework and measurement criteria differ (Krugman, 1994).

Destinations compete to earn tourist consumption and expenditure (Crouch & Ritchie, 1999). Sheehan and Ritchie (2005) point out that destination stakeholders should focus on a strategic perspective in planning, marketing and development, while Fayos-Sola (1996) observes that the focus of tourism policy has been progressively shifting from increasing the number of tourists and amount of income to the competitiveness of tourism destinations as places that utilize their resources effectively. Of course, many different factors need to be considered (including effective resource utilization) to achieve competitive advantage over other tourism destinations (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). Enright and Newton (2005) also point out that the competitive success of a tourist destination largely depends upon its strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore, it is beneficial for countries to narrow the competitiveness analysis to the industry level and highlight relevant lessons from the generic literature (Markusen, 1992). Lall (2001) supports this view and emphasizes the point that it is more practical and theoretically sound for competitiveness analysis and measurement

to concentrate on a particular sector, such as tourism, than on the economy as a whole.

Many specific terms and approaches have been put forward to achieve competitive advantage. Some studies attempted to investigate strategies for tourism destination competitiveness. For example Domínguez et al. (2015) considered 17 attributes and focused on the measurement of two variables: the level of accessibility (degree of access) and the number of accessibility products and services offered by tourist destinations. Truong and King (2009) identified the most significant destination attributes that influence tourists' perceptions, which include attractions, accessibility, accommodation, ancillary services and awareness. Further, Upadhyaya (2002) recommended that accessibility and accommodation facilities are the critical attributes of the tourism industry.

Tourism, as discussed in Chapter 2, has different fundamentals from manufacturing and other service industries. Many studies suggest that a new competitiveness model specific to tourism should be developed (e.g. Buhalis 2000; Leiper 2008). Some studies attempted to employ a competitiveness model to recommend ways for tourist destinations to become more competitive. The focus is measuring the competitiveness of a tourist destination (e.g., Crouch & Ritchie, 1999; Dwyer & Forsyth, 1997; Enright & Newton, 2005). The most popular Conceptual Model of Destination Competitiveness was developed by Ritchie and Crouch (2003), which consists of two parts: comparative (focused on resource endowments, such as human, physical, knowledge and capital resources, as well as the size of the economy, infrastructure, and tourism superstructure, and cultural and historical resource) and competitive advantage (focused on resource deployment, such as auditing and inventories, maintenance, growth and development, and effectiveness and efficiency). The conceptual model of destination competitiveness identifies economic, environmental, political, socio-cultural and demographic factors. The researchers also note the influence of the micro competitive environment, which is composed of residents, employers, mass media, financial organizations, and business tourism (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). Mazanec et al. (2007) note the straightforwardness of the model as it focuses on all important elements that may characterize the tourism competitiveness of a destination. On the other hand, some studies point out limitations of the model, such as the difficulty in

applying it to real cases because it measures so many factors, and is a system of definitional rather than cause-effect relationships and therefore offers no clear method by which to operationalize the model. The information requirements from the model indices are based on the assumption that inputs reflect outcome expectations (Croes & Kubickova, 2013) and that the link between inputs and outputs is not automatic (Croes, 2011).

Dwyer and Kim (2003) attempted to modify the Integrated Model, which stems from Ritchie and Crouch's (2003) study, by creating a common management category, which included tourism policy, planning and destination development. The Integrated Model has been applied to many studies, mainly to indicate the determinates of destination competitiveness (Armenski et al., 2011). Hong (2009) also attempted to address some of the limitations of Ritchie and Crouch's Conceptual Model of Destination Competitiveness. In doing so, Hong suggested ranking the categories and factors by measure their importance, then measuring the factors quantitatively and analyzing the relationship between competitive and comparative advantages, as well as tourist competitiveness.

While the models developed from Ritchie and Crouch's Conceptual Model of Destination Competitiveness have identified several competitiveness dimensions and attributes, they fail to evaluate the relative importance of the essential elements. Since individual destinations cannot have the same set of attributes (Crouch et al., 2008), there is a need for empirical studies not only to identify competitiveness factors relevant to specific destinations but also to assess their relative importance (Mazanec et al., 2007). Furthermore, Ritchie & Crouch's Conceptual Model of Destination Competitiveness and the Integrated Model cannot reveal the weakness of a destination's competitiveness structure.

To address these limitations, this study uses Importance Performance Analysis (IPA), considered a popular technique with many destinations in terms of attractiveness and competitiveness (Deng et al., 2008; Tafesse et al., 2010; Azzopardi, 2011; Kozak, 2004). The IPA technique is based on marketing conceptualizations, introduced in 1997 by Martilla and James (1997). The approach is highly versatile in diagnosing priority areas for improvement (Enright & Newton, 2004; Lee, 2015; Deng, Kuo and Chen, 2008). The literature suggests that the IPA can be beneficial in measures of attribute importance and competitiveness (Oh, 2001). Several studies have applied the

IPA technique to identify priorities to attend to. For example, Breiter and Milman (2006) performed IPA to identify attendees' needs and service priorities when attending an exhibition at a large convention centre. The study gave high importance to the following features of the convention facility: signage, availability of local high-quality lodgings, sufficient restrooms, and the ability to get cell phone signal. Furthermore, statistically significant differences were found between the level of importance and performance of the majority of the facility services and features of the convention centre. Boley, McGehee and Hammett (2017) conducted an IPA to investigate residents' attitudes towards sustainable tourism initiatives (STIs) across three counties in Virginia, with varying levels of emphasis placed on sustainable tourism within their strategic plans. The study found that residents placed uniformly high levels of importance on the STIs, but varied in their perceptions of performance. Lai and Hitchcock (2015) found 59 studies accepted the IPA technique as flexible and easy to adapt to destinations, restaurants, hotels, and tourism attractions such as ski areas, hot springs and zoos. Sever (2015) supports the view of IPA as a widely accepted technique and Whitfield, Dioko, Webber and Zhang (2014) conducted IPA to evaluate relevant attributes in light of the emergence of complex MICE venues and destination resort and, in particular, emphasizes the relative importance of destination facilities, and core event-related attributes on determining exhibition attendance in China, Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan.

IPA has been used to evaluate performance in several studies, since the concept of benchmarking is strongly related to competitiveness (Kozak, 2004). Benchmarking should go beyond performance evaluation as the technique allows performance benchmarking against other destinations. For example, Önder, Wöber and Zekan (2017) applied Data Envelopment Analysis (DEA) for benchmarking urban tourism destinations, assessing measures available in TourMIS. Findings include inefficiency scores that have both managerial and political implications. Furthermore, the concept of a virtual reference destination assisting managers and politicians to analyze their destination's strengths and weaknesses is introduced.

Grounded in the preceding discussion, there are calls to consider new competitiveness models in the study of tourism destinations more generally (e.g. Buhalis, 2000; Dwyer and Kim, 2003; Leiper, 2008; Murdy and Pike, 2012).

Heath (2003, p.500) notes that, ‘an analysis of the literature indicates that the rationale for developing a model of competitiveness that focuses specifically on the tourism sector is based on the nature of tourism offering products.’ The basis of such models is to be found in the extant generic literature on destination competitiveness (Crouch and Ritchie, 1997; Dwyer and Kim, 2003). Tourism destination benchmarking cannot be understood in isolation but must be examined in the broader context of competitiveness (Kozak, 2002). The literature reviewed suggests useful theoretical and practical insights can be generated by general conceptualizations and models, with implications for MICE tourism.

3.8 Tourism Destination benchmarking research

Many destinations around the world have invested in the construction of convention centres with the dual purpose of improving their image and generating economic benefits for the community (Oppermann, 1996; Limnarat and Tangthong, 2017; DiPietro et al., 2008; Jurakanit & Taweepornpatomkul, 2018). This includes the Asia Pacific MICE tourism industry, which is growing rapidly and is highly competitive between destinations. The governments of Japan, Singapore and Malaysia had plans in the 1980s to increase the number of international conventions, providing substantial funding to promote the MICE industry and intensify competition (Australian Tourist Commission, 1987). Singapore was the leading destination for MICE travellers in 2017; the country held the world’s biggest event for the burgeoning FinTech industry. The number of delegates increased significantly, and several events were held for the first time in Singapore and the region (SECB, 2018).

Weber and Ladkin (2003) agree that within tourism, meetings and conventions are one of the fastest-growing segments. The main reason is the economic benefit for the destination. This idea is supported by Huang (2016), who points out that the MICE industry can be used as an indicator of a country’s economic development. For example, exhibitions held in New York, Paris and Brussels may reflect the level of economic development of the host countries (Huang, 2016). The MICE industry now spans the globe, and an image as an attractive MICE location has become an important objective for an increasing number of destinations. Therefore, many destinations try to promote themselves

as MICE destinations, and insights into MICE destination competitiveness and benchmarking are still needed.

In the academic world, the number of studies utilizing benchmarking in MICE destinations is still extremely limited, even though benchmarking is considered a useful tool with which to identify best practice (Gardini and Bernini, 2002). The literature review shows benchmarking has so far ignored the MICE industry, especially in the measurement of MICE destinations' performance as defined in Chapter 2. This might be because of the unique nature of different destinations and the complexity of the industry environment. A set of necessary conditions must be satisfied to ensure the success of benchmarking (Xiang et al., 2007). Therefore, most studies focus on specific aspects rather than the destination itself. Oppermann (1996) stated that it is essential for CVBs, DMOs and convention centres to have a comprehensive understanding of the site selection process of meeting and planners so that they can cater to them and secure meetings and conventions for the respective city. The study suggests that in order to improve and manage the MICE destination, strengths and weaknesses need to be identified.

More understanding could also help to improve knowledge of the site selection criteria. Gardini and Bernini (2002) found that there are some critical factors influencing conference centres' performance concerning the city system, including the quality of hotels and hospitality, the rooms inside the centre and the distance from the centre to the city. Catering, shopping, and leisure services may also attract business tourists to a destination, and transportation is also crucial to the success of the MICE industry. Furthermore, a handful of scholars focus on MICE destinations, such as Oppermann (1996), who investigated which factors make MICE destinations more appealing. The study found that the core issues were meeting rooms and facilities, and the quality of hotel services, followed by hotel room availability, the attractiveness of the location, safety/security and access to transportation.

Some studies attempted to investigate the critical factors that might influence MICE destination management. For example, Harven-Tang, Jones and Webb (2007) named seven critical success factors, namely leadership, networking, bidding, infrastructure, ambassadors, skills, and branding. The study also suggests that seven factors could help a destination to implement

marketing initiatives to attract domestic and international MICE traveller. Further, Prihati et al. (2018) attempted to formulate a policy strategy by comparing the existing policy with two similar regions that had advanced in tourism and combining the theory/model of policy implementation of Mazmanian and Sabatier, actualized by Gustama (2013: pp.125-126). This study intends to examine strategies that can be applied to tourism promotion policies in Pekanbaru City that can support the development of the tourism potential of Riau Province. The study found that each destination has its own strengths and weaknesses. According to the literature, each destination might have unique advantages and disadvantages in the minds of visitors, individual research should be undertaken. Therefore, the current study attempts to identify the performance factors of MICE destinations, building on previous research.

In doing so the study has developed the research framework from previous studies presented in Table 3.2, which gives an overview of benchmarking research in the field of tourism and hospitality focusing on destinations. There is a growing body of research assuming that benchmarking is far more than comparative analysis and there has been insufficient use of statistical tools to test the results obtained from the comparison of qualitative measures, such as mean scores. Nevertheless, there may not be a need to use statistical tools for the assessment of some quantitative measures, but for a large sample population, mixed methods will be useful in this study. For destinations, benchmarking quantitative and qualitative values will highlight different aspects. Quantitative methods could be used to explore differences between the levels of tourists' satisfaction, supported by qualitative findings. As mentioned, it is challenging to conduct external benchmarking compared with other benchmarking types as it is essential to identify any differences in the characteristics of destinations in external benchmarking (Kozak, 2004). However, this type of assessment helps identify not only the profile of the relevant market segment but also possible collaborator destinations with whom external benchmarking can be conducted (Prihati et al., 2018). This could help the organization understand competitors who are involved in the same market decide who and what to benchmark.

Table 3.2 An overview of destination benchmarking research in the tourism industry

| Authors | Type of Industry | Methodology | Objectives |
|---|--------------------------------------|--------------------|--|
| A.George Assf Efthymios G.Tsionas (2015) | Destination | Quantitative | Develop a model to estimate tourist destinations' performance |
| Gardini and Bernini (2002) | Convention centres | Mixed | To seek best practice |
| Derby City Council (2001) | Destination; in the UK | Mixed | To seek best practice and identify strengths and weakness |
| Zhang, W E I (1992) | International Meeting Destination | Quantitative | Identify factors that need to improve for an international Meeting destination |
| Lee, Choi and Breiter, 2016 | Destination | Quantitative | Identify indicators for convention competitiveness |
| Southern Tourism Board | Destination; in the UK | Mixed | To seek best practice and identify strengths and weakness |
| Liverpool City Council (2000) | Destination; in the UK | Mixed | To seek best practice and identify strengths and weakness |
| European Commission (1998) | Destination; in Europe | Case study | To establish the best performing areas |
| Seaton (1996) | Countries and destination | Quantitative | To identify strengths and weakness |
| Prihati Prihati, Surya Dailiati, Hernimawati, Hernimawati and Alexsander Yandra (2018) | Destination (Malaysia) | Qualitative | To identify the principal issues concerning the policy implementation of Pekanbaru tourism promotion, which has not been able to develop the tourism potential of Riau Province optimally |
| Davidson, Rob Keup, Mady (2014) | Destination | Qualitative | To identify the need for European CB to rethink their current marketing resource allocations and strategies by developing and implementing innovative Web 2.0 strategies for building sustained customer loyalty and competitive advantage |

Very little research has attempted to develop methodologies for internal or generic benchmarking studies. The main aim of internal benchmarking is to improve the performance of the tourism business or destination by identifying their strengths and weaknesses using feedback from travellers and locals (Kozak, 2004). Within the application of generic benchmarking, businesses or destinations can look to other destinations or international standards in search of practical solutions to their particular problem (Kozak, 2004). Developing a benchmarking tool to evaluate MICE destinations has been neglected. Therefore, the study attempts to fill the gap, as mentioned in Chapter 1. Table 3.2 shows a selection of studies that have focused on the MICE industry in Thailand in the last decade in Table 3.3. The studies in the tables attempted to increase the potential development of an element of a relevant product and service in the MICE industry, but only a few studies focused on improving a destination as a MICE city. There is still a lack of research that attempts to develop a tool or indicator with which to assess the performance of a MICE city, or what variables should be considered. This study aims to seek the best practice of MICE destinations in a Thai context by using destination benchmarking to assess Thailand's five officially designated 'MICE Cities' (Bangkok, Pattaya, Phuket, Chiang Mai, and Khon Kaen).

This study proposes guidelines that will underline the importance of measurement and improvement for destinations, and the role of benchmarking. The guideline framework has been adopted from the BESTBET framework, after completion of a review of relevant literature on benchmarking, tourism destinations and the MICE industry. As mentioned in Chapter 1, this study aims to assess the BESTBET framework and develop an outline for a specific context. The American Productivity and Quality Centre (1999) and literature review both suggest that organizations should create their own tools, as the selection of measures depends on the objectives of each authority and different businesses or destinations might have different purposes and expectations.

Table 3.3: Studies of the MICE industry in Thailand

| Authors/years | Title | Aim |
|---|--|--|
| Sirirassamee (2005) | The satisfaction of foreign participants with an International Meeting in Thailand | To evaluate foreign participants' satisfaction with international meetings |
| Samutejak (2004) | SWOT analysis of the MICE industry in Thailand | To evaluate the strengths and weakness of Thailand's MICE industry |
| Loechaihakul (2002) | Evaluating the potential and competitiveness of the MICE industry in Thailand. | To evaluate the potential and competitiveness of the MICE industry by applying SWOT analysis |
| Sangpikul & Kim (2009) | An overview and identification of barriers affecting the MICE industry in Thailand | To understand the barriers impeding the success of Thailand's meeting and convention industry |
| Songsiri, Sunpasit and Sorasak (2017) | Determinants of Thailand's MICE industry organizational effectiveness | To investigate the effects of capacity management, customer relationship management, information computer technology (ICT), service quality, supplier relationship management (SRM), and supply chain management (SCM) on Thailand's MICE industry and its organizational effectiveness |
| Tunming, Chaigasem and Siriwong (2019) | The increasing of potential in tourism logistics supply chain to Khon Kaen ME city, Thailand | To study the situation of the tourism logistics supply chain and undertake study the SWOT analysis in Khon Kaen ME city |
| Kantapop and Pei-Chun (2019) | Event sustainable development in Thailand: a qualitative investigation | To gain a deeper understanding of barriers to sustainable event development in Thailand |
| Montakan Chubchuwong (2018) | The impact of CSR satisfaction on destination loyalty: a study of MICE travellers in Thailand | To study 1. the characteristics of CSR activities conducted for international business groups; 2. the factors that impact business travellers' satisfaction with CSR activities; and 3. the influence of satisfaction with CSR activities on destination attachment and destination loyalty. |
| Jurakanit and Taweepornpatomkul (2019) | Potential development of the MICE industry in Hat Yai District, Songkhla Province | To explore the MICE industry in Hat Yai district |
| Uansa-ard & Binprathan (2018) | Creating awareness of halal MICE tourism business in Chiang Mai, Thailand | To identify the effectiveness and strength of halal MICE tourism business in Chiang Mai. |
| Jotikasthira, Bhutibhunthu and Chuaychoo (2016) | Competency-based hiring as a tool to improve the Thai meeting and convention industry: A sales executive perspective | To identify competencies necessary for Thai meeting and convention firms to stay competitive and to suggest human resource practices that help them select, retain, and develop their talent from a sales executive perspective. |

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of benchmarking theory, which included theoretical background, different types of benchmarking, the benefits of the tool, and several example models. It also explained implementation for performance improvement and competitive advantage. This chapter also contributes several examples of benchmarking studies, both in general manufacturing businesses and the tourism industry. Weaknesses of the benchmarking process have been addressed as well. This review of the literature found that there are still only a few studies that focus on the tourism industry and tourist destination benchmarking. Moreover, there is a lack of benchmarking as applied to the study of MICE destinations.

Chapter 4. Conceptual Framework of the study

4.1 Introduction

This chapter starts by focusing on justifying and explaining the framework adopted in this study, the BESTBET framework. The chapter evaluates the BESTBET project as well as the implications this might have for the study. The chapter provides the theoretical foundations of the model as well as the findings of an earlier study that utilised the framework in a British context. Specifically, this chapter defines the concepts underpinning the BESTBET framework and reviews relevant theoretical approaches to destination benchmarking, which inform the theoretical framework of the current study. Then, the factors found to be critical success elements for developing a business and event tourism destination are described, together with supporting literature.

4.2 BESTBET Framework

The MICE sector has long been recognized as one of the fastest-growing segments in the tourism industry (Weber and Ladkin, 2003; McCartney, 2008; Webb and Haven-Tang, 2006; and Chubchuwong, 2019). Thus, many countries, including the UK, expend much effort to create and implement strategies to attract domestic and international MICE tourists. Many worldwide destinations are investing in facilities such as purpose-built venues with high-quality equipment and high standards of technology, with the dual role of improving the destination image and subsequently generating income and benefits for local communities. Southeast Wales aims to develop and promote business and event tourism by attracting more business tourists. Therefore, the BESTBET project was conducted with the aim of identifying critical success factors to develop and promote business and event tourism (BET) in southeast Wales. This was supported by Capital Region Tourism (CRT) and the Regional Tourism Partnership (RTP) for southeast Wales (i.e. Cardiff, Newport, Monmouthshire, and the Vale of Glamorgan). The project attempted to identify and establish best practice for business and events tourism in order to demonstrate the value of working in partnership (Haven-Tang, Jones and Webb, 2006). The project identified critical success factors, which are presented in the BESTBET

framework in Figure 4.1. The seven factors from the BESTBET framework are *leadership, branding, bidding, networking, ambassadors, skills, and infrastructure.*

The BESTBET project addressed event tourism issues by analysing best practice in business and event tourism in UK destinations, as well as identifying skills shortages and training gaps within the tourism sector in southeast Wales. As a result, BESTBET aimed to pursue two of CRT's strategic market propositions, as well as adding value to the visitor experience, raising awareness of the potential of the business and event tourism market and enhancing economic growth. The results from the BESTBET study improved the quality of the business event tourism product and services in southeast Wales. The study found seven factors that influence the development of the business and event destination, but several other studies have also attempted to identify other essential elements, discussed in the next section.



**Figure 4.1 A framework for best practice in business and event tourism
(Haven-Tang, Jones, and Webb, 2006)**

As stated in section 1.1, previous literature has found that the MICE industry is one of the most important segments of the tourism and hospitality industries globally. As well as generating significant revenue, this sector is less likely than the other segments to be sensitive to seasonal change (Go and Govers, 2000).

Therefore, many destinations have put effort into developing their MICE business. Several studies attempted to establish a set of key success factors for tourism destinations (e.g. Kozak, 2004; Önder, Wöber and Zekan, 2017). However, there are only a few studies which focus on MICE destinations specifically. The aim of this study is to assess the relevance and usefulness of destination benchmarking tools for MICE destinations, and to develop the conceptual logic of destination benchmarking for the MICE sector in Thailand. As noted, the BESTBET framework has been adopted because the aims of the BESTBET study map onto this study's objectives. Firstly, the aim of the BESTBET project was to establish best practice in relation to business and event tourism in the UK context and thus to demonstrate the value of working in partnership. In addition, the aims of the original BESTBET study were to raise awareness of the growth potential of business and event tourism, and the benefits of participation in business and event tourism networks. These aims align well with the aims of this study, which also sets out to develop a best practice framework to apply to MICE destinations in Thailand. Secondly, the BESTBET study undertook interviews across the UK to develop enhanced intelligence and identify the key issues for business and event tourism in Southeast Wales. The project is similar to the TCEB's plan of promoting five cities as MICE cities in Thailand. Therefore, identifying the essential factors to develop MICE cities in Thailand aligned with this project. Thus, the best practice factors which were found in the BESTBET study were deemed to be a useful starting point to assess if the framework is relevant and useful as a destination benchmarking tool for MICE destinations in the Thai context. Thirdly, the BESTBET framework focused on general destinations, rather than destinations that had been identified as MICE tourism destinations. This aim of BESTBET is similar to this study's objective no. 4, to enhance understanding of ways to improve additional factors and identify best practices in MICE destinations in Thailand, adding value to the visitor experience, raising awareness of the potential of the business and event tourism market and enhancing economic growth.

Table 4.1 Attributes of MICE Destination Improvement

| Oppermann (1996) (Quantitative) | Go & Govers (1999) (Quantitative) | Chacko & Fenich (2000) (Mixed Methods) | Qu et al. (2000) (Quantitative) | Kang et al. (2005) (Quantitative) | Lee et al. (2016) (Quantitative) | BESTBET (Mixed methods) |
|--|--|---|--|--|---|--------------------------------|
| Meeting rooms and facilities | Facilities | Availability of air service | Availability of modern hotel facilities | Accessibility | Accessibility | Leadership |
| Hotel service quality | Accessibility service | Convenient local transportation | Hotel services | Attractions | Availability of facilities | Infrastructure |
| Hotel room availability | Price | Destination services | Hotel rates | Cost | Affordability | Bidding process |
| Clean and attractive location | Image | The promotional appeal of the city | Availability of food and banquet services | Environment | Appropriate services | Ambassadors |
| Safety and security | Climate | Hotel room availability | Availability of equipment | Facilities | Agreeable environment | Networking |
| Air transportation access | Environment | Hotel room rates | Services provided at convention centres | Image | Attractions | Skills |
| Food and lodging costs | Attractions | Helpfulness of service staff | Rental fee of venue | Information | Appealing image | Branding |
| Overall affordability | | Meeting space availability | Square footage available for exhibition | Safety | | |
| City image | | Cost of food and beverages | Availability of modern video-link teleconferencing | Services | | |
| Transportation costs | | Safety of attendees | Availability of simultaneous interpretation facilities | | | |
| Restaurant facilities | | | Accessibility | | | |
| Exhibition facilities | | | Safety and hygiene | | | |
| Scenery and sightseeing | | | Infrastructure | | | |
| Climate | | | Image (political and economic) | | | |
| Nightlife | | | Professional meeting planners | | | |
| | | | Climate and environment | | | |
| | | | Travel assistance | | | |
| | | | Cost of transportation | | | |
| | | | Attractions and entertainment | | | |

Source: Adapted from Lee et al., 2016

Another reason that BESTBET was chosen can be seen in Table 4.1, which presents a comparison of the BESTBET framework with attributes of convention destination competitiveness in previous studies, showing that BESTBET is just one of a selection of studies that identify bidding as a critical factor (a factor ignored in the literature) (Getz, 2004). Getz states that DMOs and CVBs act as agents on behalf of their members or an entire destination when they bid on events. CVBs in Canada, for example, often take on the role of a facilitator, encouraging and assisting other organizations in bidding on events, working with or parallel to convention centres, which are mostly managed independently. While convention centres, hotels, and other venues conduct routine sales and occasional bids, DMOs are generally responsible for bidding on larger events with destination-wide impacts (Getz, 2004).

Bidding is interesting to investigate further in the Thai context, primarily because of the centralized managerial system that exists in Thailand. As mentioned in Chapter 1, TCEB is the central government leadership organization for the MICE industry in Thailand, and this top-down approach may have an effect on the bidding process. The last reason that the BESTBET framework has been selected for this current study is because the BESTBET study focused on marketing activities and strategy, and found ambassadors to be a critical success factor in business and event tourism. Ambassadors have not been discussed in any of the previous studies, but the BESTBET study found them to be vital. Furthermore, cost issues were not seen to be a central focus of the BESTBET study, contrasting with the other six studies. This idea is supported by Fenich (2005), indicating that cost is less important in meeting planners' evaluations because the MICE traveller is usually funded by their workplace. Therefore, the MICE group focuses more on quality than cost (Campiranon and Kom, 2006).

The studies in Table 4.1 provide a useful comparison to previous studies because they address MICE destination competitiveness and associated factors, rather than a simple checklist for site selection (for example, the list produced by Qu et al., 2000). Also, these studies focus on identifying key convention destination competitiveness factors based on the perceptions of major stakeholders, mainly meeting planners and policy-makers (DMOs and CVBs) (Chacko & Fenich, 2000; Go & Govers, 1999; Kang et al., 2005; Oppermann,

1996; Qu et al., 2000). This is similar to the current study, which also focuses on policy-makers and business sectors. Finally, these studies reflect current trends and include a comprehensive examination of essential factors that are not restricted to the MICE sector, but rather provide a holistic view (Lee et al., 2016). They were not restricted to specific types of conventions such as corporate meetings, association conventions, academic seminars, or trade shows, but strove to provide a holistic view of the convention industry. Furthermore, other studies focus more on developing a single area or destination rather than evaluated the strengthness from a number of different destinations, as happened in the BESTBET study, which in turn makes the BESTBET study a stronger baseline to start from.

This section has provided an overview of the BESTBET framework for best practice in business and event tourism in southeast Wales. It has highlighted that some of the same critical success factors from the BESTBET framework may be found in the other relevant studies. However, some elements have only emerged in the BESTBET project, such as ambassadors and bidding, which only a small number of studies focus on. The section also identifies a variety of factors that can have an impact on MICE destinations' benchmarking. The next sections give more detail on the seven factors identified by the BESTBET study.

4.2.1 Leadership

Leadership, in the context of business and event tourism or MICE destinations, could be defined as a demonstrating a clear strategy, securing appropriate funding and top-level commitment to business and event tourism (Haven-Tang, Jones and Webb, 2006). The leadership element of BESTBET could also include effective communication between key stakeholders in the destination, destination coherence, and a destination team approach (Haven-Tang, Jones and Webb, 2006). Hawkins and Mann (2007) indicate that policy-makers with a clear marketing strategy are considered a key success factor in destination management, including direct tourism and revenue generators such as contribution of tourism to human welfare and environmental quality (Gunn, 1994; Yodsuwan, 2009; Saarinen, 2006). Wilson, Fesenmaier, and Van Es (2001) introduce the importance of leadership for a thriving tourism destination,

and consider various forms of leadership, namely 1) good community leadership; 2) support and participation of local government; 3) sufficient funds for tourism destination development; 4) strategic planning; 5) coordination and cooperation between the business sector and local leadership; 6) information and technical assistance for tourism development and promotion; 7) good convention and visitor bureaux; and 8) widespread community support for tourism. All these factors rely on effective cooperation of relevant stakeholders for successful development (see Chapter 2).

Tourism destination planning and development is a long-term process that needs a clear strategy, such as creating and funding a sustainable annual events program in the city. The strategies of tourism destination planning and development at the destination level need to have a common direction and destination management is usually operated by CVBs and local government, who play significant roles as leaders (Oppermann, 1996; McCartney, 2008; Ard and Binprathan, 2018). Chapter 2 presented the role of CVBs as policy-makers and leaders in MICE destination development. Conversely, to identify as a business and event tourism or MICE city is to be able to condense multiple identities within the destination, from different sectors with varying interests and levels of power (Bennett and Koudelova, 2001).

Previous studies found that stakeholders taking a collaborative approach is an underlying factor for tourism destination development (e.g. Bramwell, 2000; Buhalis, 2000; Yodsuwan, 2009). Therefore, the whole process links the public sector with key stakeholders in the destination. Edgell (1987) indicated that policy-makers and suppliers in the tourism industry should be working together on present and future policy and the proper courses of action for their specific destination. Numerous previous studies suggest that good communication and participation among various stakeholders are considerably affected by tourism planning actions (Hardy and Beeton, 2009; Gunn, 1994; Marwick, 2000; Simpson, 2008). According to the literature review, leadership is vital due to the complexity of the working process. The leadership of a MICE city consists of policy-makers, who lead stakeholders through the policies. Chapter 2 describes DMOs or CVBs leading the MICE industry in most countries. In Thailand, where MICE is new, it is managed by the TCEB, together with MICE suppliers and industry associations (Sangpikul and Kim, 2009). As

a result, all the policies, strategies, international convention bidding, and human resource training are principally under the TCEB.

Wang and Krakover (2008) point out that key players in the MICE industry should be coordinating activities to provide a quality product. The success of a developing MICE destination requires excellent communication, coordinated campaigns and the inclusion of all local principals and suppliers (Uansa-ard and Binprathan, 2018). The current study seeks to further understanding of leadership in a MICE city and identify whether leadership is a critical success factor in developing and managing MICE cities in Thailand.

4.2.2 Infrastructure

Since the MICE industry has become strategically important for development in many countries around the world (Huang, 2016), many countries have worked to improve their city infrastructure to compete aggressively for MICE activity (Crouch and Ritchie, 1997; Crouch and Louviere, 2004; Xu, Wong and Tan, 2016; Tunming, Chaigasem and Siriwong, 2019). Infrastructure in a MICE context could be similar to other tourism sectors, as described in Chapter 2, but there are also specific elements that may require attention in order to satisfy a MICE traveller. Chen and Mo (2012) suggest that infrastructure could affect MICE travellers' decision to attend and many studies focus on infrastructure, specifically issues of accessibility, facilities and accommodation (Dipietro and Breiter, 2008; Comas and Moscardo, 2005; Krip Jurakanit and Suchart Taweepornpatomkul, 2018). Consequently, infrastructure can be considered a key success driver to meeting a MICE traveller's requirements.

Numerous extant studies found infrastructure to be critical to developing destinations. Haven-Tang, Jones, and Webb (2007) found that transportation links are directly related to a destination's ability to organize and deliver a competitive and quality business and event destination. Whitfield, Leonardo and Dioko (2014) highlight factors such as accessibility, infrastructure and accommodation as core considerations for holding exhibition and events at a destination. It is generally agreed that convention venues and facilities are key site selection factors for international events (Fenich and Hashimoto, 2005; Yoo

and Chon, 2008; Woo and Ladkin, 2011; Nadkarni, Leong and Wai, 2007; Matthews, 2007; Baloglu and Love, 2005).

Furthermore, the BESTBET framework found that the needs of each destination are different, as each destination is suited to a particular target market. For example, Cardiff caters for the association market who want events with a broad social agenda and the ability to use different venues, while rural destinations such as Monmouthshire and the Vale of Glamorgan are more suited to an events market that does not need a specific venue. The BESTBET project found that suitable venues are required to boost the exhibition market in south Wales. Many previous studies indicate that areas that wish to host MICE activities need to consider infrastructure such as accommodation, exhibitions facilities, publicity, conference and event venues, and accessibility (Webber and Zhang, 2014). Infrastructure has been the focus since Thailand established the MICE cities in 2014 (TCEB, 2013). However, infrastructure is still challenging and the current study will investigate how stakeholders reflect on this factor.

4.2.3 Bidding

Bidding is defined as the formal communication through which a destination attempts to attract an event (Getz, 2004). The MICE industry is proliferating and creating a massive amount of spending worldwide (Uansa-ard and Binprathan, 2018), because the MICE industry brings economic benefits for the destination and community as well as improving their image (Oppermann, 1996). Gartrell (1988) indicates that a bid is a foundation market tool to attracting MICE activity and increasing the economic viability of a host city.

Davidson and Rogers (2006, p.12) state that bidding is a process by which a host permits event planners 'to work with that individual who is willing, and in a position, to influence, directly or indirectly, the conference destination decisions of the professional institutions to which they belong'. Haven-Tang, Jones and Webb (2007) found that bidding is a critical success factor in developing a business event tourism city, because winning the bidding process could consider several aspects, such as economic impact, regional promotion, and financial return. Likewise, Getz (2004) highlights that critical success factors for winning bids were 'strong partners'. Furthermore, Westerbeek et al.

(2002) found the bidding process to be one of eight factors that influenced the destination selection process.

Most of the time, bidding will be accommodated by convention bureaux, as described in Chapter 2 under the role of CVBs. Bidding is a foundational activity operated by CVBs or DMOs regarding their aims to get the city selected (Gartrell, 1988). For example, the members of the Canadian Association of Convention and Visitor Bureaux (CACVB) found that facilitation and production of events was a common task for bureaux. The Australian Convention and Visitor Bureau promotes itself as a not-for-profit organization and offers a free unbiased service, including supporting bidding activity for conference organizers (McCabe et al., p.168).

Bidding may require specific resources and expertise beyond that of standard sales efforts (Getz, 2004). Moreover, the bidding process could involve several elements such as convention and visitor bureaux, explanation or description of the destination or bidders, the support offered, and which organizations hope to host events (Horte & Persson, 2000). To make a successful bid, all the criteria need to be met. The context of bidding in a MICE content includes a brand image, packaging, price, service quality, and venues (Horte & Persson, 2000). The bidders should also have bargaining skills and specialized facilities for both large and small events (Getz, 2004). Studies agree that the event bidding process is essential in the development of a destination to attract the MICE market. A city that aims to become a hub of MICE activity may find it hard to attract their first few events and a reputation as a known host of events is vital. Likewise, as mentioned previously (see section 2.6.3), TCEB as the leading body in the MICE industry of Thailand has been working on improving many aspects in the MICE sector in order to succeed in bidding processes. However, since the management system in Thailand is centralized, it would be interesting, although outside the scope of this study, to investigate further if bidding processes in the context of top-down policy work in practice. In addition, but also outside the scope of this study, it would also be useful to gain a better understanding of potential criteria or issues that need to be addressed by key players in Thailand in order to be successful in the bidding process.

4.2.4 Ambassadors

Only a few studies mention ambassador programs. The BESTBET study found ambassadors to be a critical factor associated with thriving business tourism and securing business tourism for a destination (Haven-Tang, Jones and Webb, 2007). In this context, ambassadors (such as local tourism associations and other marketing alliances) work together and focus on the competitive advantage of the destination in order to create a win-win situation for all stakeholders (Wang and Xiang, 2007, Prideaux and Cooper, 2002; Saxena, 2005; Wang and Krakover, 2008).

The Congress Convention Association (2013) defined an Ambassador in the context of the MICE industry as a person who have knowledge and stature of MICE industry. The person can also be considered as a representative of a MICE destination. Their role is prepared to work with local meeting professionals to secure convention business for the destination. In response to the competition in the MICE industry, the use of ambassadors has emerged in many destinations. Haven-Tang, Jones and Webb (2007) clarify the role of ambassadors in the UK as a destination's promoter in the bidding process, as well as someone who helps to gather market intelligence. Ambassadors assist with marketing activities in tourism businesses and share information regularly to support each other's activities in order to compete with other destinations (Wang and Krakover, 2008).

The ambassadors' program has been considered important in many MICE destinations such as Saudi Arabia, which has promoted the ambassador program (Alagos, 2014). One of the reasons Singapore is considered a top convention city is due to the effort of MICE professionals or ambassadors, ensuring that the country is ready to host international meetings and events (Keeva Lim, 2015). The ambassador program created by ICC Wales was designed to encourage influential people in their field to promote Wales as a suitable destination for international conferences and events. Lockstone-Binney et al. (2014) claim the primary support for the role of ambassador programs lies in empowering DMOs and CVBs to bid successfully for international association meetings and events using the expertise and networks of local leaders.

A successful ambassador's program requires coordination among stakeholders. Some stakeholders lack clarity about the role of ambassadors in business and event tourism (Haven-Tang, Jones and Webb, 2007). Chapter 2 explained the fragmentation of the tourism industry and the complexity of destinations, and the relationship this has with the long-term competitiveness and success of the destination. Balance between cooperation and competition among the stakeholders can be difficult. However, the complexity of tourism destination management could be managed by CVBs or DMOs, ensuring that the local tourism industry understands that overall benefits of the destination are more important than one business's profit (Wang and Krakover, 2008).

The role and responsibility of CVBs and DMOs was described in Chapter 2, as their job is to attract business to the destination via sales and marketing activities, sales missions in potential markets and creating advertising programs (Wang and Krakover, 2008). Ambassador programs are a marketing activity usually run by a DMO or CVB to ensure that the ambassadors understand their role, know the team and connect with people they have to deal with. In these programs, it is essential to keep motivating and informing the members, providing the chance to build networks and exchange ideas (Davidson and Rogers, 2006). However, the issue of different modes of relationships around cooperation and competition among the organizations might need to be considered. The majority of studies in tourism focus on the cooperative aspect of the relationship rather than competition (Wang and Krakover, 2008). Organizations often engage with both competitive and cooperative activities as they co-exist with each other (Bengtsson and Kock, 2000).

As mentioned in Chapter 2, a destination has to effectively coordinate resources and capabilities between participating businesses (Wang and Krakover, 2008). The current study attempts to investigate the ambassador's program, to see if it could assist in developing MICE cities and whether stakeholders understand the importance of ambassadors in Thailand.

4.2.5 Skills

Skills have received significant attention in a number of studies related to the MICE industry. Some researchers indicate that the MICE industry has been growing over the last decade, but the skills of workers in the industry are still limited (Fenich and Hashimoto, 2010; Lee and Hiemstra, 2001; Brewerton and Lynne, 2001; Jones and Brewer, 2001; Ard and Binprathan, 2018). In the hospitality industry, research has shown that the quality of staff is of fundamental importance to success in the industry (Swarbrooke and Horner, 2001). Rogers (1998) examined a range of skills required in business events and tourism in the UK, which included the ability to speak foreign languages and technological skills. Since the rapid development of transportation systems, visitors expect excellent service (Haven-Tang, Jones and Webb, 2007). Furthermore, the MICE industry is a complicated business requiring staff skilled in areas such as marketing, event planning, and interpersonal communication.

Kuo, Chen and Lin (2010) found that good command of languages, the right attitude, and friendly service are the most critical elements in customer satisfaction for international conferences in Taiwan. In South Wales, event-specific technical and administrative skills are essential for the organizational and management skills of the workers in business events and tourism (Webb, Haven-Tang and Jones, 2006). Furthermore, in meeting site selection criteria, Fawzy (2008) found that in the site selection process, the skills and abilities of workers are critical for success in the process of MICE planning. This idea was supported by Kim and Boo (2010) as they found the ability of the supplier or worker in MICE industry to meet quality specifications and specific delivery schedules reflected in the site selection process.

Since the literature found that skills need to be improved, the knowledge and understanding of each position needs to be precise. For instance, in South Wales it was found that there is a lack of understanding about the differences within the MICE market (such as incentive travel), as well as a lack of awareness among many service providers in the industry about the potential of business-to-leisure (Webb, Haven-Tang and Jones, 2006). Likewise, in Thailand, the number of people with a specific degree related to MICE is still limited. Uanasard and Binprathan (2018) found that the service providers in Thailand such as

hotel staff, restaurant servers, and tourist guides still lack an understanding of service. This is particularly the case when related to specific needs, for example the halal tourism business. This might be because those who work in the MICE industry typically have a different background related to hospitality (Sangpikul and Kim, 2009). Rogers (1998) indicated that appropriate education and training courses in the MICE sector are growing slowly because there is a lack of professionals available to deliver them. Furthermore, the complexity of employment is relevant because there are many types of jobs (Swarbrooke and Susan, 2001). Specific education and training course positions are needed (Fenich and Hashimoto, 2010). To unravel this issue, perhaps Thailand could establish a MICE degree program to meet the demand for qualified and professional MICE personnel, along with appropriate training for specific jobs and internal training for international conference services (Kuo, Chen and Lin, 2010). Knowledge and training can help staff to be fully prepared for the challenges of work, and can help to develop the business and thus better service quality in the MICE industry (Uansa-ard and Binprathan, 2018).

4.2.6 Branding

The concept of branding in a marketing activity is a task for DMOs, considered as a set of associations linked to particular destination and venues, which is memorable for visitors and provides an understanding of the destination's characteristics and the differentiation of the destination (Williams et al., 2011). DMOs activities here can be defined as marketing activities that support the creation of a name, symbol, logo, wordmark or other graphics that both identify and differentiate a destination; that convey the promise of a memorable travel experience uniquely associated with the destination; and that serve to consolidate and reinforce the recollection of pleasurable memories of the destination experience, all with the intended purpose of creating an image that influences consumers' decisions to visit the destination in question, as opposed to an alternative (Blain, Levy and Ritchie, 2005, p.331).

It is clear that destination branding creates an awareness of the destination through the brand's imagery, such as a slogan that reflects the essence of the destination (Henderson, 2006), reducing customer search costs

and perceived risk (Williams et al., 2011). All these have the intent of creating an image that influences visitors' decisions to visit the destination (Blain et al., 2005). Lehto and Morrison (2007) agree that the destination's image is an integral and influential part of the traveller's decision-making process and consequent travel behaviours. Many places around the world have invested considerable sums of money in destination branding campaigns. However, there is some debate about the benefits of destination branding (Henderson, 2006; (Morgan, Pritchard & Piggott, 2003), due to the complexity and challenge of bringing divergent stakeholders together and reaching a consensus as to the overall destination 'image' sought in the marketplace.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, several destinations worldwide have become aware of the economic and cultural value of the MICE industry. Consequently, each destination has established marketing strategies to ensure competitiveness. Bensi et al. (2016) state that the Convention Bureau (CB) of a destination has responsibility for providing a marketing plan to attract significant events for event organizations, as well as offering a plan of events, city tours, and social activities, transport solutions, welcome receptions for delegates, etc. Gartrell (1988, p.20) supports the idea that the role of CVBs is to 'develop an image that will position their cities (or regions) in the marketplace as a viable destination for meetings and visitors.' Hence, it can be confirmed that the responsibility for branding and promoting a city as a MICE destination as well as for coordinating the organization and marketing of the event is delegated to them (Davidson and Rogers, 2006). Marketing and promotions for MICE are usually highly scrutinized areas. Di, Di and In (2016) suggest that CVBs need to understand the cities' character to create destination branding. Therefore, communication activities among the stakeholders in the city need to look at new trends, exploiting local resources to show the destination in different ways (Beldona et al., 2003)

Destination branding is a strategy that marketers apply to clarify the characteristics and uniqueness of a destination (Williams and Ashill, 2011). Kolb (2011) indicates that business and event tourism destination branding consists of promoting an area and the benefits of visiting it, answering the question "Why should I visit your city?" Rogers (2006) notes that branding MICE destinations and venues may help visitors differentiate one destination

from another. A number of studies found destination image to be a factor influencing decisions to locate meetings and conventions in a venue or destination, and to attributes of destinations that might yield competitive advantages (Choi, Lehto and Morrison, 2007; Nelson and Rys, 2000; Di, Di and In, 2016; Swarbrooke and Horner, 2001).

Chapter 2 identified a combination of MICE or business and event tourism destinations with tangible and intangible features. Therefore, there is complexity in the destination branding process at several levels, as presented in Table 4.2. Typically, DMOs, CVBs, and local stakeholders are involved in the process of brand development. However, destination branding is more complicated than branding a venue or individual products or services (Rogers, 2015). Even though the destination brand hierarchy in Table 4.2 comprises several 'brand' levels, Pike and Ryan (2004) stress that a destination can be branded by emphasising a particular aspect of the city or area, ensuring that a destination's MICE brand was also compatible with its leisure tourism brand. Harrill (2005) emphasizes the need for destination brands to be supported at different levels in the hierarchy, noting that for a brand program to prove successful, it must also enjoy the proactive participation of the destination's constituents.

Table. 4.2 Destination brand hierarchy

| <i>Level</i> | <i>Entity</i> |
|--------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1 | Country brand |
| 2 | A country business tourism brand |
| 3 | State business tourism brands |
| 4 | Regional brands |
| 5 | Local community brands |
| 6 | Individual suppliers' business brands |

Source: Davidson (2006), adapted from Pike (2004)

Table 4.2 shows the complexity of destination branding. The intricacy of the destination, as well as the involvement of various local stakeholders, might

make the development and management of destination difficult, as it has to consider their different wishes (Sautter & Leisen, 1999). Conflicts between stakeholders could easily arise if some manipulate resources for short-term benefits, for example. The key to long-term success is a compromise with all these interests, which is very difficult to achieve (Buhalis, 2000; Yuksel and Yuksel, 2003). Marketers need to ensure that the process and strategies are appropriate for each type of brand (Harrill, 2005). Therefore, before branding the destination or venue, marketers should clarify their target market and establish an appropriate marketing mix.

The sensitivity of destination branding involves identifying a set of primary attributes recognized as a brand image. This may include many components such as name, logos, characteristics of the city, and symbols (Rompf, Breiter & Severt, 2009). The success of the destination branding development may involve attributes such as history, heritage, culture, emotional appeal, culture, and city status to make the destination more appealing (Blain, Levy & Ritchie, 2005; Hankinson, 2005; Park and Patrick, 2006).

Usually, the destination selection for a MICE event is the event planner's responsibility, ensuring that the events fit the destination. A number of studies found that destination image is one of the criteria that event planners consider (e.g. Rompf, Breiter & Severt, 2009; Webb & Haven-Tang, 2006; Kuo, Chen & Lin, 2010; Kozak & Nield, 2004). Hankinson (2005) examined key destination brand image attributes used to describe market MICE destinations, from three huge event-planning companies. The study found nine factors (physical environment, economic activity, business tourism facilities, accessibility, social facilities, the reputation of the destination, the character of residents and size of the destination) to be the most significant. Likewise, McCartney (2008) noted that image perceptions would affect destination choice (Sasidharan, Sirakaya & Kerstetter, 2002). To achieve success, a destination might consider promotional programs, promotional budgets and advertising, publicity, marketing strategies, and convention locations (Oppermann, 1996). In the context of BESTBET, developing a strong destination brand is a priority to compete with other business event and tourism destinations as well as increase market share. Many studies focus on destination planning, development of facilities and destination marketing (Gunn, 1994; Davidson & Maitland, 1997; Longjit & Pearce, 2013;

Bernini, 2009; Busuioc & Andrei, 2013; Pergelova & Ruiz, 2011; Kozak, 2002; Rich Harrill, 2005).

Little research illustrates this in tourism, particularly for MICE destination branding. An exploratory study by Jin, Weber and Bauer (2012) from the perspective of exhibition organizers concluded that destination choice is the most important factor in attracting exhibitions, more than venue choice. Yet these studies did not stress the importance of the MICE destination brand and its promotion, which have a strong influence on site selection. This research gap requires immediate attention since MICE destinations must highlight their benefits in order to position themselves in the market. This is supported by Sangpikul and Kim (2009), who agreed that there is a lack of research on developing MICE destinations in terms of branding and preparing for the rapid growth of the competition. Therefore, the current study attempted to investigate MICE destination branding factor, to see if it should be considered one of the key success factors in developing MICE destinations.

4.2.7 Networking

Networking in the context of the MICE industry can be defined as connection, communication, and collaboration between related associations. Section 2.7 provided a list of key stakeholders and their roles in the MICE industry. Collaboration and partnership are fundamental to success in developing MICE destinations. Networking and cooperation among a team supports the success of a destination (Yodsuwan, 2009).

A destination's development team, such as DMOs and CVBs, supports and shares things such as appropriate training, education, and organization learning for their membership. Typically, the management is organized by DMOs and CVBs under a common umbrella. The mission of these associations is to offer leadership for the local community and provide a greater sense of coherence within the destination (Choi, Lehto and Morrison, 2007). MICE associations are usually run by the CVBs and DMOs as they have resources and information about the major elements, such as transportation, local communication, visitors' attractions and bidding processes, among others. Rompf, Breiter and Severt (2009) state that DMOs play a vital role to develop a

destination, as they provide information about the area. In the competitive MICE industry, networking among stakeholders becomes more critical, with the key five primary functions including working as an economic booster, directing the industry, marketing, representing the community and destination branding (Morrison, Bruen & Anderson, 1998). Additionally, to create an appropriate marketing planning for the region, DMOs and CVBs are accountable, because they have the authority to undertake action to achieve strategic objectives (Buhalis, 2000), as well as supporting networking and cooperation among the stakeholders to enhance the competitiveness that most destinations desire.

The BESTBET study found that external networking enhances market intelligence for event planners (Haven-Tang and Webb, 2007). The study found that there are various benefits for the membership to being a member of a trade association, e.g. Meetings Industry Association (MIA), British Association of Conference Destinations (BACD), International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA). External networking gathers information that provides associations with benefits, including potential customers. Therefore, marketers and event planners could focus more on specific groups. Another benefit is that providers could plan their investment, as more information could help them to make more informed decisions about the right marketplace. Taiwan, for example, found that the best strategy for international conference tourism is in collaboration with other organizations (Kuo, Chen and Lin, 2010).

4.3 Conclusion

Several issues have been uncovered through this review of literature. The critical success factors from the BESTBET framework have been highlighted. It is expected that the findings from these research questions will contribute to theoretical advancement in MICE destination benchmarking and contribute to practical MICE tourism destination management. The chapter began with an overview of the context of the BESTBET project and explains why this study has been adopted to further the objects of the current study. Then, the seven factors from the framework were listed, supported by previous studies.

Chapter 5. Methodology

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the paradigm of this research; the research design; the research methodology, process, and instrumentation; the pilot study; and an outline of the data analysis process that will be applied. The study adopted a sequential mixed methods approach that aims to address critical success factors in developing a destination benchmarking model for MICE cities.

The first qualitative phase of the study involved semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders in the MICE industry in order to explore the benchmarking model in more depth and gain a comprehensive understanding of whether the factors in the model are applicable in an international setting, or if additional factors may arise. The second quantitative phase of the research involved questionnaires as a means of testing the revised destination benchmarking model, to measure the overall performance of individual MICE cities, and to compare this performance against the performance of a country as a whole. The study's objectives provide a road map for the entire research process and are restated as follows:

Research Objectives

1. To develop the conceptual logic of destination benchmarking for the MICE sector.
2. To critically evaluate the key factors that contribute to the destination benchmarking practice of MICE destinations in a non-Western context.
3. To assess the relevance and usefulness of destination benchmarking tools within the Thai tourism industry for MICE destinations.
4. To enhance understanding of ways to identify and improve additional factors and identify best practices in MICE destinations in Thailand.

These objectives guide the study and have determined the methodological position, research design, methods, and procedures taken up in this inquiry. This chapter presents a broad review and evaluation of the methodological options

open to the study of developing MICE destinations, and then discusses the specific strategies and analytical techniques applied in this research.

The chapter consists of nine main sections. Section 5.2 establishes the context of the study; section 5.3 discusses the ontological, epistemological, underpinnings that inform the study; 5.4 research design; 5.5 the methodological approach to the study of the mixed methods; and section 5.6 outlines the first qualitative phase of the study. This section covers instrument design, the sampling frame, data collection and analysis methods. This is followed by section 5.7 which is concerned with the quantitative second stage of the research design. This section deals with methodological issues similar to those outlined in section 5.6, and discusses the design strategies, the quantitative analytical processes, and the data treatment utilized in the measurement of the destination benchmarking model. The chapter ends with an overview of research ethics (5.8) and researcher reflexivity (5.9)

5.2 The context

As established in the first four chapters of this thesis, the theoretical background to this study is located at the nexus of destination competitiveness, destination benchmarking and the MICE sector. To date, much research has focused on destination benchmarking more generally, and typically from a Western perspective. With recent strategic initiatives outlined by the Thai government, via the Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB), this study seeks to better understand the role of MICE branding at destination level, as well as whether or not destination benchmarking is useful in enhancing destination competitiveness in a non-Western setting.

Thailand is a country at the centre of Southeast Asia composed of 76 provinces. At 513,120 km² (198,120 sq mi) and over 68 million people, Thailand is the world's fiftieth-largest country, with Bangkok as its capital. In the MICE industry context, Thailand benefits from its geographic position between China and India and tops the ASEAN region in terms of exhibition spaces sold and as the most profitable MICE market (TCEB, 2017). The number of MICE travellers has been growing steadily since 2010, rising from 679,585 to 1.28 million individuals in 2017. MICE revenue has increased from US\$1.45 billion in 2010 to US\$3.1 billion in 2017. According to the Tourism & Travel

Competitiveness Index 2017, published by the World Economic Forum, Thailand ranks 34th out of 136 countries worldwide and 3rd among ASEAN countries, after Singapore and Malaysia (Chubchuwong, 2019).

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the TCEB under the office of the Prime Minister markets MICE events in Thailand. The TCEB has created marketing strategies to encourage the inclusion of Thai arts and culture in these events in order to promote Thai national heritage with the aim of attracting more MICE travellers. The TCEB identified five major MICE cities in Thailand to target growth in the MICE sector: Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Khon Kaen, Pattaya, and Phuket. Thailand is divided into four regions, each with a different historical background, culture, language, and people: Northern Thailand, North-eastern Thailand, Central Thailand, and Southern Thailand. The five MICE cities are spread across these four regions.

As stated, the aim of this research is to extend knowledge and understanding of destination benchmarking theory. First and foremost, this will happen through the examination of destination benchmarking within the MICE sector specifically; secondly, by locating the research in the Asia Pacific region, the intercultural replicability of existing destination benchmarking models will be tested. Finally, the location of this research also allows for the viability and efficacy of the Kingdom of Thailand's initiative on the branding of MICE destinations.

Fig 5.1 Map of Thailand

(Source: <http://www.sitesatlas.com/Maps/Maps/tha-pol.htm>)

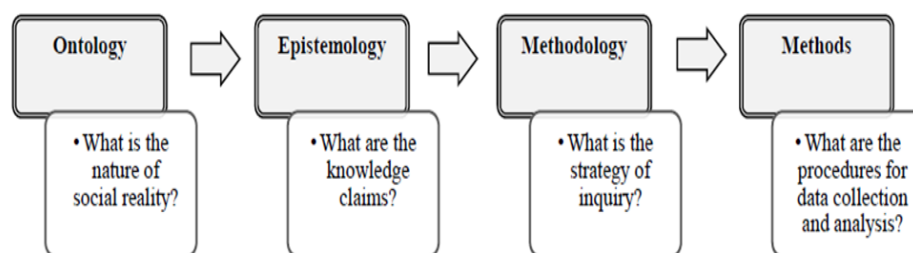
5.2.1 Research Philosophy and Positionality

There are various methodological approaches to social scientific inquiry that can inform and guide research in tourism. These are mostly based on philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality (ontology), knowledge (epistemology), values (axiology), research strategies (methodology), and procedures (methods) (Creswell, 2013). These underlying assumptions directly or indirectly influence the researcher's choice of research framework, including broad-based strategies and specific techniques to address the research question (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, the right research framework helps the researcher to carry out their research successfully (Kerr & Gary, 2001). The research design is used to justify

decisions relating to the research procedures, such as the theoretical framework, research questions, research methods and appropriate sampling strategies (Robson, 2002). There are many different methodological approaches to social scientific inquiry (Taylor et al., 2010) mainly differentiated by the philosophical assumptions related to the nature of reality that underly them. Pearce (1993) indicated that in terms of general methodological approaches, strategies, and methods in tourism study, an explicit statement on, and justification of, philosophical stances enhance the quality of tourism research. Philosophical issues can also help to clarify the research design as well as identifying ways to deal with the research questions (Mark & Thorpe, 2002).

As mentioned, researchers hold different views of reality. Opposing philosophical positions in turn suggest different methodological approaches (e.g. quantitative vs. qualitative) and distinct methods and procedures to address the research questions (hypothetical-deductive vs. inductive; surveys vs. in-depth interviews) (Taylor et al., 2010). Creswell (2003) and Guba and Lincoln (1994) indicate that a clear philosophical research strategy and methodology provides a clear research paradigm within which to conduct research. Fig 5.2 shows the interrelated levels of decision-making as it relates to the research design, which the current study used as guidelines (Creswell,2013).

Fig 5.2 Philosophical Assumptions Underpinning a Research Design Choice (adapted from Creswell, 2013)



5.2.2 Research paradigm

A research paradigm is a basis of beliefs that influences researchers in selecting research methodology and empirical techniques (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Before conducting any research, it is necessary to clarify the research paradigm that reflects the philosophical assumptions underpinning the study. The research paradigm emerges in response to the way researchers answer the central aspects of research aims. Schwandt (2007) defines these as follows:

The ontological stance: the nature and form of reality. This reflects the worldviews and assumptions within which researchers operate in their search for new knowledge.

The epistemological stance: the nature of knowledge and the relationship between the researcher and that being researched.

The methodological stance: methods and the process of research that the research uses in seeking out new knowledge. This involves making decisions regarding the principles of inquiry and how the investigation should proceed.

The aim of conducting research is to develop knowledge, beginning with a set of beliefs and assumptions, that is, the philosophy of the research (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Assumptions are made about realities encountered in the research (ontology), human knowledge (epistemology) and the extent to which human values influence the research process (axiology). Johnson and Clark (2006) state that the researcher should make a conscious choice in terms of philosophical commitment. Research philosophy impacts upon the actions and understanding of the research, including what the researcher knows and how they develop their knowledge. These philosophical assumptions guide the research approach, which in turn influences the methodology, techniques, instruments and procedures used to collect and analyse the data.

In relation to mixed methods research, the main philosophies are post-positivism, interpretivism and pragmatism (Saunders and Thornhill, 2012), although arguably any paradigm that succeeds positivism can be classified as post-positivist (Creswell, 2013). Table 5.1 provides a summary of these paradigms, summarizes their methodological positions and suggests alternative research frameworks, incorporating associated methods for the study.

Generally speaking, post-positivism acknowledges the criticisms levied at positivism and attempts to address some of its weaknesses (Phillips et al., 2002). For instance, positivists assume that the researcher is independent of the object or person being studied, while post-positivists recognize that their background knowledge and values can influence what is observed. Post-positivists claim that this reality can be known and understood only imperfectly and probabilistically, since post-positivist research focuses on explanations and causal relationships among variables (Saunders and Thornhill, 2012). A vital feature of this approach is the construction of qualification measures of observations and using statistical techniques to test or verify theories (Phillips et al., 2002).

Interpretivism, on the other hand, emphasizes the difference between people as individuals and the roles of each person in society. It is crucial that the researcher understands the difference between humans as social actors. Saunders et al. (2012) suggest that interpretivism is based on phenomenology, which deals with the meaning of occurrences in the world. However, interpretivism does not only depend on the researcher's point of view, but rather on the views of the individual research participants and how the person interprets his or her role within the environment (Goldkuhl, 2012). Therefore, it is important for the researcher to be empathetic and accept the various views of the research participants (Saunders and Thornhill, 2012). It is the belief of the researcher of the current study that the world is too complex to be defined by rigid theories and laws and therefore it is highly context-dependent.

Finally, pragmatism, largely associated with mixed methods, focuses on the consequences of the research. Greater emphasis is placed on the research questions rather than the methods, following the idea that 'what works' is the most logical method (Saunders et al., 2012). Pragmatist researchers view reality as being both singular and multiple, recognizing that phenomena of the study can be explained by theory, but that it is also important to assess the diverse individual input into the nature of the phenomena (Creswell, 2003).

Philosophical worldviews are not confined however to the three discussed above. A multitude of paradigms are presented in various forms of research. In addition to those discussed in Table 5.1, Creswell (2003) states that positivism, for example, aims to form hypotheses at the beginning of research

before any data is collected, after investigating the literature and other secondary sources. Critical realism aims to explain sights and experiences as underlying structures of reality that shape observable events. Critical realist researchers seek to explore the bigger picture in the context of the research, aware that understanding the social structures that give rise to a phenomenon is the only way to understand what occurs in the social world (Bhaskar, 2010). Still another paradigm, postmodernism, goes further than interpretivism in emphasising the role of language and power relations. Typically, qualitative data is collected for analysis, although this can vary (Saunders et al., 2012).

5.2.3 Paradigmatic Philosophy

The researcher's worldview that underpins this research is pragmatism. As previously alluded to, the researcher questions the relevance of ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions, instead taking a logical and pragmatic viewpoint when deciding which research methods are most appropriate for the study. Decision-making in this study was guided by the set-up and execution of the BESTBET study, due in part to the rationale provided previously (see section 4.2), but also the researcher's pragmatist worldview. The emphasis in this study is on obtaining practical outcomes for the research, that assess the factors from BESTBET framework. Given the complex nature of this study, and to address the research objectives, a rigorous method of data collection and analysis is necessary in order to draw meaningful conclusions.

The research seeks to understand the situation behind an individual factor in order for policy to be shaped (qualitative, first phase of research), and use data from the second phase (quantitative) to produce generalizable information for the whole population of stakeholders in the MICE industry in Thailand. The applied nature of this research and the emphasis on practical outcomes is very much in line with the pragmatist worldview (Saunders et al., 2012). By way of elaboration on the execution and application of pragmatism to this study, the following section sets out the method of execution for the BESTBET study to provide a backdrop against which the methodology for the present study is explained in section 5.4 onwards.

As noted previously (section 4.2), the BESTBET framework has been adopted to assess its relevance and usefulness in developing a destination benchmarking tool in a MICE, non-Western context. The BESTBET study was created by combining two research approaches (qualitative and quantitative). The first stage was qualitative research by gathering data information from a range of industry academic sources together with interviews with 50 key stakeholders. The interviews were designed to gain an overview of business and event tourism across the UK, including obstacles to development and issues relating to destination and venue selection. These were semi-structured interviews that aimed to understand factors from the BESTBET framework in order to test if the framework is relevant and useful in a different context.

Like the BESTBET project, and synonymous with pragmatism, there is value in following a similar qualitative phase in the current project in order to provide a process for determining critical benchmarking factors based on the BESTBET framework, but also on the particular cultural and geo-political context of the study's location in Thailand. The use of qualitative methods to gather in-depth data would enable pertinent factors (existing and emerging) to be investigated in more detail. Strauss and Corbin (2008) stated that qualitative techniques are excellent to uncover and understand what lies behind any phenomenon. The majority of the interview questions were based on the BESTBET framework. Also, this process permits the researcher to identify additional factors from the Thai context. The findings from the interview were used to develop a survey in stage two.

The second stage of the BESTBET framework was a quantitative survey that gathered information from 128 participants (conference and event organizers) about their experience. The questionnaire was designed to identify factors that influence their choice of destination and venue; major causes of delegate dissatisfaction; conference/venue skills, training and development and their experience of southeast Wales as a business and event tourism destination. Likewise, the current study considered quantitative research methods to be useful, not least because of its use in the BESTBET study, and other studies in the field of business-related studies (e.g Kang et al., 2005; Qu et al., 2000 and Go and Gover, 1999). The quantitative phase is associated with a postpositivist philosophy as it speaks to the quasi-objective ontological position of that

paradigm. From a pragmatic point of view, the quantitative phase provides a useful platform from which a large quantity of data can be collected from a range of respondents over a large geographical area (Jennings, 2010). A quantitative phase is also useful in order to conduct gap analysis to determine the importance and performance of the critical success factors (see section 5.8). It has been noted that the development of the survey of research phase two was modified from the findings from interviews.

The survey allowed us to obtain further results from a larger number of participants. The qualitative and quantitative study is considered necessary to test the conceptual logic framework for MICE destination benchmarking in a specific context. This is also necessary so that, in the future, the results can be used in different contexts, such as developing a benchmarking tool for MICE in a different culture or different context. The choice of the methodology of the study was designed principally to answer the research questions. Notwithstanding this, the methodological design of this study recognized the strengths of the BESTBET mixed-methods design, and aimed to simulate these closely in order to provide insights around applicability and replicability in a culturally and geo-politically distinct destination.

Considering the complex nature of the research, the use of mixed methods here enables the researcher to incorporate the value of multiple worldviews into one study. Greater focus in the methodology is placed on the research questions (pragmatist worldview) as a mean of contributing to the body of knowledge in the field, as the researcher considers these to be more important than the methods or philosophical assumptions. This is in line with previous studies that have to acknowledge limitations in adopting a single method in attempting to explain internationalization (Oppermann, 1996; Go & Govers, 1999; and Lee et al., 2016).

Table 5.1 Differences among Key Methodological Positions and Implications for Choice of Research Design and Implementation

| | Postpositivist | Interpretative | Pragmatism |
|--|--|--|---|
| Ontology: the nature of reality from the researcher's perspective | Belief in social reality but acceptance that knowing this reality will always be inhibited by imperfections in detecting its nature. The imperfections are the result of human fallibility. | Belief in multiple, constructed realities that cannot exist outside the social contexts that create them. Realities vary in nature and are time and context bound. | Singular and multiple realities (e.g. researchers test hypotheses and provide multiple perspectives) |
| Epistemology: the nature of knowledge and justification of the relation between research and reality (researcher and that being researched) | Modified dualist/objective Dualist/objectivist Acceptance that independence is not possible, but objectivity is seen as the goal and demonstrates by external verification. Findings are probably true. Distance and impartiality (Data collected objectively) | Transactional/subjectivist The results of the investigation are a product of the interaction between the subject and the investigator. What can be known as a result of the interaction? Findings are emergent/ created. Closeness (Data collected subjectively) | Practicality (e.g. researchers collect data by “what works” to address research questions) Multiple stances (e.g. researchers include both biased and unbiased perspectives) |
| Methodology Techniques, Producers, Methods to investigate reality | Modified experimental/ manipulative Hypothesis testing but more emphasis placed on the context. Qualitative and quantitative Analysis of policy-makers’ variables. | Empathetic interaction Investigator interacts with the objective of the investigation of reality is investigated in its own right and is interpreted by the investigator. Qualitative, including hermeneutics and dialectic interchanges. Analysis by case. | Combining (e.g. researchers collect both Qualitative and Quantitative data and mixed them) (Mixed methods) |

Source: Adapted from Saunders and Thornhill, 2012; Goldkuhl, 2012; Gelo, Braakmann and Benetka, 2008; Phillips and Nicholas, 2002; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2006; Creswell, 2003; Bryman, 2015.

5.3 The researcher as an instrument

The qualitative researcher systematically reflects on him or herself in the inquiry and is sensitive to their biography and how it shapes the study (Creswell, 2007). The researcher's formal education at undergraduate level is in hotel and tourism management, followed by a Master of Business Administration (MBA). Over the last six years, the researcher has been teaching in tourism and hotel management at Mahasarakham University, Thailand and undertaking research in tourism and hospitality management. The knowledge and experience related to the tourism and hospitality together with business management has influenced the researcher's positionality and subsequently research design.

Initially, the researcher intended to pursue a postpositivist research design and felt it was important to follow the associated values of reliability and validity. However, it is important to consider bias, not purely as a statement of potential weakness that requires critical self-reflection, but also as a realization of a possible influence over data collection and interpretation (Meyers et al., 2016). Dey (1993) notes that data in qualitative research are 'co-authored', and similarly, Miles and Huberman (1994, pp. 50-72) note that research 'is thinking through the meaning of data', and that an analysis is already happening, which is influenced by one's prior experiences. This is supported by Strauss and Corbin (2008, pp.32-33), who point out the value of the researcher's background to the study:

Sensitivity or insight into data is derived from what the researcher brings to the study as well as through immersion in the data during data collection and analysis ... Theories, professional knowledge that we carry within our head inform our research in multiple ways ... Our backgrounds and past experiences provide the mental capacity to respond to and receive the messages contained in the data.

Thus, the researcher's knowledge and background could influence research design and conduct. Strauss and Corbin (2008) also note that, regardless of their background, researchers should not lose sight of the data and work with concepts in terms of their properties and what the participants are saying. In this study, this was achieved by the research design of the study being focused on the nature of the study and avoiding bias in the interview process, data analysis and data interpretation.

5.4 Research Design

Creswell (2013) refers to three advanced research methodologies, namely qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods research. Many authors have attempted to distinguish between quantitative and qualitative (e.g. Chew et al., 2002; Teddlie, 2009). However, according to Creswell (2013), these two approaches should not be viewed as rigid or dichotomous, but rather different ends of a continuum (Newman and Ridenour, 1998). Comprising elements of both quantitative and qualitative research methods, mixed methods (which this study uses) appear in the middle of this continuum (Creswell, 2013).

Sequential mixed-methods designs are used when the stages of the study follow in succession, with one phase depending on the other (Creswell, 2013). Blaikie (2009) states that mixed methods provide a logic for answering a study's research questions. Subsequently, the approach represents the 'second most important research design decision' following the formulation of research questions (Blaikie, 2009, p.18). Lewis and Thornhill (2012) identify three main research approaches: deduction, induction and abduction. They note that the most common research approach is a deduction, which draws on theory to deduce hypotheses, which are then tested. The logic behind this approach is that, if the premise is true, the conclusions should also be accurate (Thornhill, 2012). The inductive approach represents the reverse process. Data is collected to explore a phenomenon and build theory. Inductive approaches often lead to the formulation of conceptual frameworks. Finally, an abductive approach is a combination of deduction and induction. Data is collected to explore a phenomenon that leads to the setting of theory or the formulation of a conceptual framework, which is then tested through collecting further data.

The choice of research approach is significant since it enables the researcher to make more informed decisions about the design of the research and determine the most appropriate methodology. Knowledge of various research approaches provides flexibility in adapting the research design to accommodate any constraints (Easterby-Smith & Thorpe, 2002). Blaikie (2009) points to the iterative nature of research, reflected in the research approach followed here, which is a combined inductive and deductive approach. Saunders and Thornhill (2012) highlight that such a combination can often be beneficial, depending on the nature of the research.

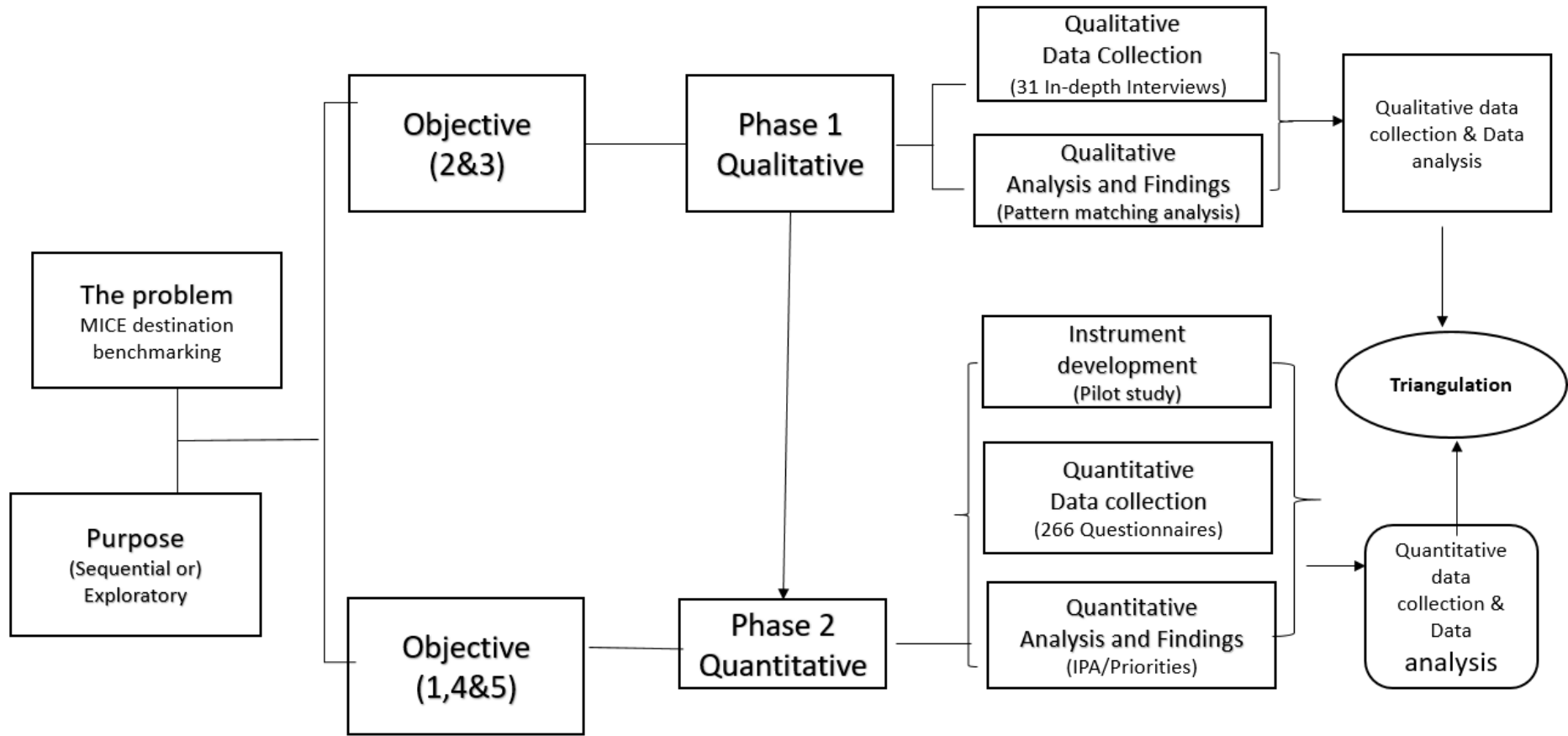


Figure 5.3: Research Design

5.5 A Rationale for Mixed-Methods Methodology

Several authors in relation to business research distinguish between quantitative and qualitative methods. For example, Hair, Black, Babin and Anderson (2010) have criticized qualitative research as purely exploratory, resulting in unreliable findings. In contrast, Maruyama (1998) argued that quantitative studies, while supported with rigorous statistical analysis, would similarly not guarantee a meaningful and accurate approach, but rather test the suitability of models and the reliability of an established hypothesis. In order to eliminate these weaknesses, a mixed-methods approach may improve the rigour of the research (Hair et al., 2008). The epistemology and empirical rationale of mixed-methods are based on the compatibility of qualitative and quantitative methods and the strengths that a combined approach has over single strategies (Creswell, 2013). Jick (1979) describes using mixed-methods to obtain a better understanding of a research problem than could be achieved via a single paradigm, building on the strengths of independent approaches and balancing out their relative weaknesses.

5.6 Research Methodology

There are three main considerations for a mixed-methods design based on various features, namely the level of mixing (full or partial), time (research conducted concurrently or sequentially) and emphasis (qualitative and quantitative research treated equally, or with more weight on one method) (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2009). Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2009) state that thoroughly mixed methods are considered differently from partially mixed methods. While thoroughly mixed methods use qualitative and quantitative research methods within one and across many research stages, the partially mixed method has a clear division between stages. Based on this distinction, the approach adopted in the current study could be considered to be partially mixed-methods where qualitative methods were employed in research phase 1 and quantitative in phase 2. The data from phase 1 contributed to phase 2 in that the qualitative findings from the study were used to develop an online survey in research phase 2 i.e. the success factors found in the interviews served as the initial step for developing ways of measuring attributes' importance and performance through the IPA method.

A mixed-methods approach has been chosen for this study as the researcher considers that uniquely qualitative studies tend to have a narrow focus, whereas uniquely quantitative studies can consider a number of relevant variables, but lack the situational focus that qualitative methods offer. In view of this, combining both methods is considered valuable in overcoming the shortcomings of each method. To replicate the BESTBET study as closely as possible, first a qualitative approach was conducted in order to gain an understanding of each factor that participants considered important or relevant to developing a MICE destination in the context of Thailand. The factors explored in interviews were developed from the existing BESTBET framework together with previous studies. The qualitative phase was also used to assess if the existing destination benchmarking model is a relevant and useful tool for destination benchmarking for MICE destinations in an international context. Subsequently, the study was also interested in exploring how factors from the qualitative findings were later evaluated in the quantitative study. The quantitative approach was used to determine the importance levels and the performance of each factor identified in phase 1. The quantitative phase further built on the quantitative phase of the BESTBET framework whereby a web-based questionnaire was administered to gather information from conference and event organizers about their conference/event experiences, as well as, factors that influence their choice of destination and venue. The present study has further investigated the gaps between the importance and performance of each variable from the perspective of a majority of key stakeholders in the MICE industry perspective. Furthermore, the Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) technique was used to identify the relative performance of each MICE city compared to the performance of Thailand as a whole. Using only the qualitative research approach would not have allowed more detailed information to be obtained. Therefore, a quantitative method was also selected to explore and gain a more comprehensive understanding of how factors impact developing MICE cities in the Thai context.

A mixed-methods approach offers the researcher the possibility to resolve problems ‘using both numbers and words’ and a combination of ‘inductive and deductive thinking’ (Creswell and Plano Clark 2007 pp. 9-10). According to Maxcy (2003, p.59), ‘it is perfectly logical for researchers to select

and use different methods as they see the need, applying their findings to a reality that is at once plural and unknown.’ Considering the complex nature of the research, the use of mixed methods here enables the researcher to incorporate the value of multiple worldviews into one study.

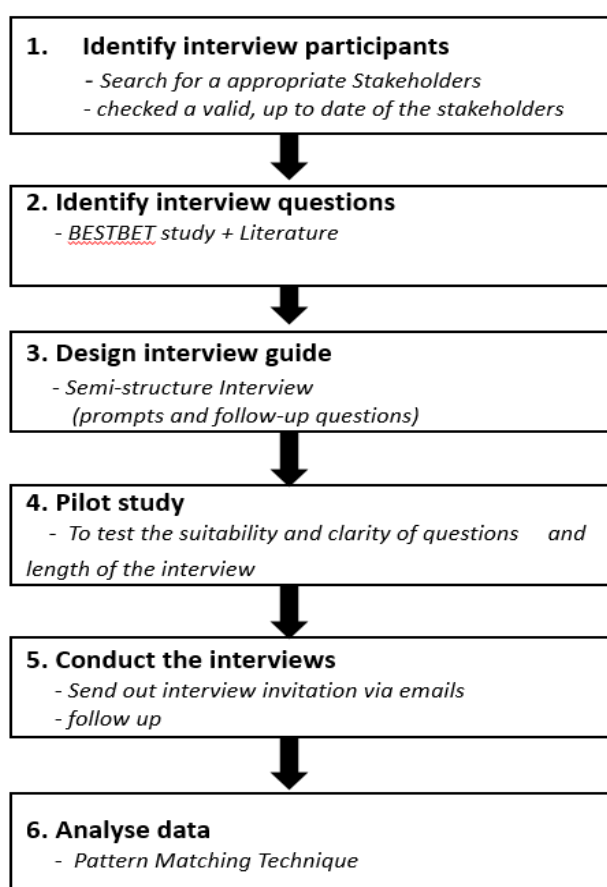
5.7 Research Phase 1 (Qualitative)

Qualitative research concerns the collection and analysis of data obtained through words rather than numbers (Bryman 2015). It has emerged as a popular method within social science research, although the use of qualitative methods is increasing in business-related research (Bryman, 2015). It is recognized that qualitative research incorporates a number of varied research methods. These include, but are not confined to, ethnography, interviews and focus groups (Bryman 2015). Qualitative interviews can take a variety of forms, including structured, semi-structured or unstructured and are often employed as part of ethnography. Focus groups are a form of group interview involving several participants led by a facilitator. This method is common in market research and has increasingly been seen in social research (Bryman 2015). To address the aims of the research the qualitative stage of this research has included semi-structured interviews. Creswell (2003) claims that face-to-face interviews permit researcher to involve and observe multiple interdependent actions during the data collection, generating high-quality data and addressing the research questions, providing an opportunity for a researcher to refine their inquiry, and investigate motives in a way that is impersonal. Semi-structured interviews could help the researcher to infer causal relationships between variables and to understand the reasons for the participants’ attitudes and opinions (Saunders et al., 2016). Semi-structured interviews also provided an opportunity to ‘probe’ answers for more explanation, which may add depth to the data obtained. In addition the discussion could enter an area that has not been considered but that helps to address the research objectives. Thus, semi-structured interviews were considered an appropriate method for reaserch phase 1. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016) highlight that interveiwes could also help to indentify the questions that should be asked in a questionnaire and so the findings from interviews were used to developpe the online survey in research phase 2 (section 5.8).

5.7.1 Instrument design

The qualitative research design of the study involved six steps and followed the process set out by Braun and Clarke (2006), shown in Fig 5.4. The first step of the qualitative method of the study is identifying a suitable participant, representative of key stakeholders in the MICE city from both the government and business sectors. Both groups (policy-makers and service providers) were considered appropriate participants as the aim of this study is to investigate a stallholders' perspective on developing MICE industry (see Chapter 2).

Fig 5.4 Qualitative Research Design for this study (Braun and Clarke, 2006)



The second stage involved developing relevant interview topic areas. This phase involved drawing on factors from the BESTBET framework, as supported by the literature review (leadership, networking, bidding process, branding, skills, ambassador, and infrastructure). Notably, a few factors were found only in the BESTBET study, but were not evident in the literature review on Thailand. Skills, for example, need to be explored in more detail in terms of specifically which skills are required in a developing country, compared to the Western

context in which the BESTBET study took place. Likewise, the bidding process with the top-down process used in Thailand might differ between individual cities. Finally, ambassadors and branding are more focused on policy and marketing strategies and need to be investigated more thoroughly in the Thai context. Therefore, the interview areas focus on some factors which consisted more components more than the others, and were flexible (Creswell, 2013).

The third stage (the design of the interview guide) ensured that a semi-structured interview was designed with appropriate questions related to each factor. This differs from the previous stage where specific interview questions were developed based on the broader topic areas identified in the previous step. The prompts and follow-up questions as is appropriate for a semi-structured interview were also developed such that the interviewer can respond to the interviewee to maximize the amount of relevant data obtained (Saunders et al. 2016). Semi-structured interviews also provided flexibility for the interviewer to direct the flow of conversation without having to retain a strict structure that might have inhibited the interviewees. A list of interview questions (Appendix B) and a sample interview transcript (Appendix C) are provided.

Interviews were conducted with stakeholders in the industry, enhancing understanding of potential ways to improve the performance of MICE destinations in Thailand. Semi-structured interviews offer a flexible format (Creswell and Clark, 2011), however, there are some concerns regarding a lack of standardisation. Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) highlight two major issues. Firstly, the relevance that the research has to the respondents, where the awareness of the value of research could affect the data obtained. Therefore information about the purpose of the study was offered to the respondents before the interview, to ensure that their consent is informed see the research ethics and informed consent form in Appendix B.

Secondly, a non-standardized format might raise ethical concerns as some information or interview questions might arise unwittingly during the interview. However, in line with the study's ethical approval from Aberystwyth University (see section 5.9), participants were informed that they could withdraw at anytime without giving any reason (see Appendix B).

The fourth stage is a pilot study in which questions were checked for clarity and were not leading or influencing the interviewee. The interview questions were

translated from English to Thai and back from Thai to English by native speakers to check for consistency of meaning. A pilot study was conducted to test the suitability and clarity of interview questions, as well as addressing the length of the interviews (Wimmer and Dominick, 2013). Due to the exploratory nature of research phase 1, pilot interviews were conducted to assess the clarity of the interview questions and the range of freedom in the responses, while remaining within the framework of the interview topic. Here, this stage two interviews were conducted for the pilot. The results of the pilot study helped the researcher to reduce the number of interview questions, as well as resulted in the decision to start the interviews with a more open introductory question.

The next stage is data collection. The interviews mostly took place at the participants' workplaces, from early January to mid-June 2017, with a total of 31 interviews being conducted in the five MICE cities in Thailand. Table 5.2 below presents participant's profile that the interviews were conducted, which included; three government and trade associations in Bangkok, two participants from such associations in Chiang Mai, Khon Kaen, and Phuket, and one in Pattaya. Data was obtained from two event planners in Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Khon Kaen and Phuket, but only one event planner in Pattaya. The participants also came from hotels and other venues in the five cities and travel agents in Chiang Mai, Khon Kaen, and Pattaya. Email invitations were sent to possible respondents, with follow-up emails sent after a week, followed by a telephone call where necessary. To obtain high-quality data, it was necessary for the researcher to conduct face-to-face interviews. Travelling around the country to conduct the interviews permitted the researcher to gain an idea of the characteristics of each MICE city, such as infrastructure, public transportation, and related services (see Fig. 5.1). Recommendations and thoughts drawn from their experience provided by some participants about the situation in the MICE in the city were also considered useful. Their background and experience in MICE and tourism provided the researcher with valuable indicators, which were useful for data analysis.

The interview avoided long questions, double-barrelled questions, leading questions and biased questions. Thought was also given to the order of questions and appropriate follow-up questions depending on the situation and the response from the participants (Robson, 2002; Mason, 2002b). At the

beginning of the interview, the researcher broke the ice with general questions about their experience in the MICE industry, how they see the different MICE cities, and what makes their city a MICE city. The interview then focused on their understanding of the MICE industry and MICE cities, and whether they saw a divide between leisure tourism and MICE or business tourism. The interview then asked the participants for their perceptions of MICE cities; their strategies in developing MICE cities; the key success factors in promoting a MICE city; and the strengths and weaknesses of their destination. The factors from the adopted destination benchmarking model were mentioned and participants were asked if these were useful elements for developing the MICE sector and whether they felt they should be included in the process of MICE destination benchmarking.

5.7.2 Sampling frame

Miles and Huberman (1994) indicate that the sample structure is the outcome of the research questions and the sampling method used. The first phase of the study aimed to gain an understanding of the form of the phenomenon, and identify a set of useful factors needed to develop a benchmarking tool for MICE destinations. Therefore, the sample for the qualitative study consisted of stakeholders in each MICE destination, as well as those who operate at a national level in Thailand. Ritchie and Lewis (2014) point out that sample diversity within the boundaries of the defined population is important. In this study, the focus was on service providers and policy-makers in the five MICE destinations. Therefore, the sample for the qualitative approach of the study attempted to cover both relevant policy-makers and practitioners.

Braun and Clarke (2013) suggest that qualitative research tends to use smaller samples than quantitative research in order to gain more detailed information. However, there is no strict sample size set for a qualitative study. Instead, data saturation is considered as a point at which a significant sample size has been reached: that is, when no new information or themes emerge from the data (Saunders and Thornhill, 2012). Even though there is no specific number of interviews to be conducted, for semi-structured or in-depth interviews, Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016) suggest a minimum sample

size of 5-20 is acceptable. For the qualitative phase of this study, a convenience sampling technique was selected. The sample of the study contains 31 people involved in the MICE industry: ten policymakers, four hotel staff, two spa owners, two owners of venues, and thirteen event planners. On average, each participant had five years of experience of working in the MICE industry, in one of the five MICE cities identified by the TCEB (see Table 5.2).

Gaining data from these participants was not always easy because of their busy schedules and heavy workloads. The issues are believed to be common for researchers, as Low and Everett (2014) found: it is important to demonstrate the value of the research to the industry, whether practical or theoretical. Therefore, the importance of the project and benefits likely to emerge from the findings were highlighted by email. These emails included an introductory letter about the project and details of the researcher, outlining the interview protocol. The participants provided informed consent to participate and were informed about the purpose of the study and of their right to withdraw at any time. Permission was sought to record the interview on a digital recorder and to take notes during the meeting, as well as discussion of confidentiality and measures to secure their anonymity in reporting the study and in future publications (see section 5.8). The researcher informed the participants of the potential benefits that may accrue to the participant and the city as a result of the research.

The interviews were recorded and later transcribed to give an accurate verbatim account. Additionally, the researcher wrote a research diary during the interview phase reflecting on the issues discussed during each interview. Interviews lasted 30-50 minutes but maintaining the interest and attention of the interviewees after 20 minutes was difficult, particularly in a business environment when many other distractions were evident. Five interviewees preferred to dispense with the recorder, stating that they could be more honest; and there were some logistical issues that meant the five interviews were carried out over the telephone. In both cases, handwritten notes were taken instead. The reflective period after each interview was seen as important to recall any comments that may have been made before or after the recording to help recollect thoughts and reactions to participants' responses, as well as to inform and develop interview questions as the research progressed (Phillippi and Lauderdale, 2018 and 2013).

Table 5.2 Participants' profiles

| Type of business | Position | City |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|-------------|
| Government/Trade Association | Direct Manager | Bangkok |
| Government/Trade Association | Manager | Bangkok |
| Government/Trade Association | Manager | Bangkok |
| Event planner | Manager | Bangkok |
| Event planner | Staff | Bangkok |
| Hotel | Staff | Bangkok |
| Venue | Manager | Bangkok |
| Government/Trade Association | Manager | Chiang Mai |
| Travel agency | Staff | Chiang Mai |
| Hotel | Manager | Chiang Mai |
| Spa | Manager | Chiang Mai |
| Spa | Manager | Chiang Mai |
| Event planner | Staff | Chiang Mai |
| Government/Trade Associations | Staff | Chiang Mai |
| Hotel | Staff | Khon Kaen |
| Venue | Manager | Khon Kaen |
| Hotel | Manager assistance | Khon Kaen |
| Travel agency | Manager | Khon Kaen |
| Government/Trade Associations | Manager | Khon Kaen |
| Event planner | Staff | Khon Kaen |
| Event planner | Owner | Khon Kaen |
| Event planner | Staff | Khon Kaen |
| Event planner | Manager | Khon Kaen |
| Government/Trade Associations | Staff | Pattaya |

| Type of business | Position | City |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| Travel agency | Staff | Pattaya |
| Hotel | Staff | Pattaya |
| Hotel | Staff | Phuket |
| Event planner | Manager | Phuket |
| Event planner | Staff | Phuket |
| Government/Trade Associations | Staff | Phuket |
| Event planner | Staff | Phuket |

Source: Own creation

5.7.3 Data analysis

The data analysis process started with the transcription of the recorded interviews. Since interviews were conducted in Thai, this process also required the interviews to be translated into English. This process was conducted by the researcher and proofread by native speakers of these languages for quality purposes, aiming to guarantee that what was said by interviewees in these languages is correctly reflected in their English translation. The reflective research diary was useful during the transcription process, should any issues emerge with the recording. As noted above, a field diary was used to record post-interview reflections and this process was completed after each interview. Notes on non-verbal cues, gestures or voice intonation for example, were recorded.

The research analysis follows a process of pattern-matching analysis as described by Yin (2014) and Saunders et al. (2016). This technique was combined with thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was used to identify, analyse and report patterns or themes in the data in detail (Braun & Clarke 2006), matching the themes with the factors from the BESTBET framework.

Analysis of the interviews included three important phases, namely compiling, disassembling, and reassembling (Yin, 2011). The first part of the data analysis involved compiling and sorting the field notes amassed from the fieldwork and other data collection, mainly from interview transcripts. The next step was breaking down the compiled data into smaller fragments or pieces

(disassembling). This step helped to assign new labels or codes to the data. Straus's (1987) coding paradigm was applied, whereby the researcher should be asking questions about what interactions, conditions, strategies or consequences relate to an initial code of the text. These were then refined and re-categorised into broader groups to assist in answering the research questions outlined above. In this sense, some *a priori* coding took place, whereby key words and phrases from the research questions were used to thematically group the coded text. Therefore, the coding was mostly related to the existing factors of the BESTBET model as well as seeking to identify new and additional factors. The disassembling procedure may be repeated many times as part of a trial-and-error process of testing codes (Yin, 2011).

Reorganizing the data into different groupings and sequences via substantive themes can be achieved using computer software. However, such tools also can consume a lot of a researcher's time and energy and still produce disappointing results (Ritchie and Lewis, 2014). Another option is memo writing, which, similar to disassembling, allows a researcher to go back and forth between the initial ideas about how to disassemble the data and the actual data, potentially leading to the modification of the initial ideas. The current study has applied memo writing as an appropriate technique. The last step is rearrangement and recombination by depicting the data graphically, arraying them in lists and other tabular forms (Yin, 2014).

Next, explanation building and testing (pattern-matching) followed, as recommended by Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2016). Pattern-matching involves predicting a pattern of outcomes based on theoretical propositions to explain the data (Saunders et al., 2016). This approach was selected because the study aims to modify a new framework for a specific context. Yin (2014) suggests utilizing existing theory and then testing the adequacy of the framework deductively as a means to explain the findings. If the pattern of data matches that which has been predicted by the conceptual framework, this likely means that an explanation has been found. Possible threats to the validity of the conclusions can be discounted. Therefore, in order to address the research aims, pattern-matching was applied due to its precise nature and relative straightforwardness (Yin, 2014). Despite relative ease of use, there are potential pitfalls associated with this method. Sufficient depth must be given to the

analysis, that appropriate codes are identified, and that such themes are not just based on the interview questions (Suanders et al., 2016).

The process of data analysis conducted in this study is shown in Table 5.3 below. A full discussion of the interview data is presented in Chapter 7.

Table 5.3 Explanation Building and Testing (Pattern-Matching technique) of the study

| Step | Yin (2014) & Saunders et al. (2016) | This study |
|------|--|---|
| 1 | Compiling and sorting data Familiarizing yourself with the data | Transcribe interviews and re-read notes to identify patterns. |
| 2 | Disassembling Generating initial codes | The patterns identified in step 1 were used to create a code list. First cycle of coding (BESTBET framework) |
| 3 | Reassembling Searching for themes | The code list from step 2 was refined to create themes. The second cycle of coding (BESTBET framework and literature) |
| 4 | Defining and naming themes | Transcripts and themes were re-read to establish final themes. Identify additional factors that interviewees raised with the elements from the BESTBET framework |
| 5 | Producing the report | Accounting for and writing up the analysis of the factors. |

Source: Developed for the study, based on Yin (2014) and Saunders et al. (2016)

5.7.4 Data quality

As with any research, questions are raised over the reliability, validity, and generalizability of findings in qualitative research. Some scholars (Robson, 2002) would argue that qualitative data should not be tested for reliability, validity and generalisability in the same way as quantitative data and Bryman and Bell (2015) highlight there are debates about the use of reliability and validity measures of qualitative research, particularly since the concept of measurement is associated with quantitative research and does not resonate with qualitative research. Mason (2002a) states that qualitative researchers are accountable for their research and points to the need to achieve rigorous work

that is of high quality. This idea is supported by Seale (1999, p.6) who emphasizes taking a ‘much more active and labor-intensive approach towards genuinely self-critical research so that something of originality and value is created,’ which requires a good structure in the research design. The research process followed Patton’s (1990) guidelines in meeting the issues of credibility. This study, following Patton’s (*ibid*) recommendations, included three elements upon which the credibility of qualitative research is dependent: rigorous techniques for gathering high-quality data; a credible researcher, based on training, experience and status; and the philosophical paradigmatic theses the researcher subscribes to (see Table 5.4).

Patton and Cochran (2002) agree that the researcher is key to the credibility of the qualitative research process, as they make decisions about the instruments of the data collection and data analysis. To aid this, the researcher underwent research training to improve qualitative research skills, provided by Aberystwyth University. Reliability in a qualitative study depends on the primary data collection process (Hair et al., 2010). Here, the researcher strove to undertake a thorough data collection process at all stages. Hair (2007) and Patton (1990) agree that triangulation is recognized as a useful method in ensuring reliability and validity within qualitative research. Broadly speaking, triangulation is recognised as a means of overcoming the limitations of a single methodology, as well as biases, generalizability and threats to the validity of the research (Faugier & Sargeant, 1997; Robson, 2002). Denzin (1970, p.310) point to triangulation as involving “multiple observers, theoretical perspectives, sources of data and methodologies”, while Bryman (2015) notes that triangulation is the use of more than one method of data in studying social phenomena (Bryman, 2015). Triangulation in this study appears at various points, including extended fieldwork, the collection of data over a more extended period, external peer review, and the verification of interpretations and conclusions of research by research experts external to the study (Hair et al., 2007).

Table 5.4: Formulating a Rigorous Process of Research

| Credibility Issue (Patton 1990) | This Study |
|--|---|
| What techniques and methods were used to ensure the integrity, validity, and accuracy of the findings? | A rigorous process of designing the qualitative research phase has been conducted, focusing on employing tried and tested methods in all aspects of this research phase: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identifying participants - Identify interview questions - Designing the interview guide - Conducting the pilot study - Conducting the full study - Analyzing the data |
| What does the researcher bring to the study in terms of qualifications, experience, and perspective? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The researcher has undergone research training designed to improve the qualitative research skills provided by Aberystwyth University. - The researcher remains neutral and impartial to all participants of the study |
| What paradigm orientation and assumptions undergird the study? | The researcher believes in the pragmatist paradigm, centred on the ‘what works’ principle (see sections 5.3.1 and 5.3.2), and is, therefore, open to all issues relevant to the research |

Developed for this study, adapted from Patton (1990)

5.8 Research Phase 2 (Quantitative)

This section is concerned with explaining the survey method, implementation stratagems, and quantitative analytical process utilized in the second stage of the research design. The quantitative approach of the study was developed from the findings of the qualitative study in research phase 1 and the questionnaire used to collect data. A quantitative research approach is associated with the use of standardized measures so that the varying perspectives and experience of people can fit into limited, predetermined response categories to which numbers are assigned (Patton and Cochran, 2002). This strategy emphasizes the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables (Ryan and Bernard, 2000). This section provides a detailed explanation of the quantitative

phase, covering the research method, sampling strategy, data collection, monitoring and analysis. The discussion opens with a rationalization of the survey research design as an appropriate strategy for quantitative research, presented in Figure 5.5. It begins with an elaboration on the choice of the survey population, stakeholders' evaluations and the sampling frame. The self-administered questionnaire was used as an efficient data-collection, followed by assessing the research strategy and survey instruments, and finally data analysis and the quantification procedures applied to produce reliable and valid results.

5.8.1 Quantitative Research

Quantitative research uses numerical data analysis to explain relationships between variables (Creswell, 2013). There are several main methods of quantitative data collection, such as questionnaires, tests, and observations (Bryman, 2015). It is also recognized that existing data can be used in such research (Easterby et al., 2002). In the context of tourism research, the questionnaire is the most common tool (Jennings, 2010), as questionnaires are seen as beneficial in studies with time and geographical constraints since they are generally quick to administer, as well as being a cheap method for dealing with participants dispersed over a large area (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Moreover, questionnaires can be sent in one large batch, saving time compared with interviews that must be conducted one at a time (Saunders et al., 2015). Additionally, interviews may require more than one person to conduct them, leading to possible inconsistencies in data collection (Saunders et al., 2015). However, it can take time for questionnaires to be returned, and there may be many recipients that do not respond at all. Furthermore, postal questionnaires are considered better than interviews when dealing with the issue of bias in questions. Further advantages of questionnaires lie in the structure of the survey (Sudman and Bradburn, 1982). Questionnaires eliminate the potential for interviewer variability that may occur when interviewers change the ordering or the wording of questions (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Postal and internet questionnaires (either online or by email) are the main option for self-completing questionnaires (Bryman, 2015).

Bryman (2015) points out some drawbacks of self-completing questionnaires. Despite eliminating the interviewer effect, the absence of an interviewer means that respondents cannot be prompted when answering questions. This could lead to confusion among participants as to the meaning of the question, which can distort the answers or lead to unanswered questions. Additionally, participants cannot be probed for further information, which can be significant in obtaining full information. There is also a greater risk of missing data with self-completing questionnaires compared to interviews, referring to issues of prompting and question salience as discussed above. There is also a higher risk of obtaining a low response rate from self-completing questionnaires. Response rates are seen as significant in research since there is a risk of bias in the data.

For practical reasons, it was decided that an online questionnaire would be issued to companies, thus reducing costs associated with postal questionnaires. For this study, an electronic survey was advisable, when resources are limited and such a survey suits the target population (Yun and Trumbo, 2006). Jennings (2010) also suggests that the main advantages of the online questionnaire are the scope and speed of contact, referring to the ease of conducting an online questionnaire, which can be linked to data analysis programs, allowing direct data entry into analysis software and the ability to achieve a broad geographic reach. The online questionnaire software Bristol Online Surveys was chosen to administer the survey of this study. The benefits of using such software can be seen in the data analysis process, since the software can collate the data obtained through the questionnaire software and easily export it directly into analysis software, such as Excel or SPSS.

5.8.2 Sampling Frame

The need to sample is one that is almost invariably encountered in quantitative research (Bryman and Bell, 2015). The population of interest in this phase of the research was stakeholders (as defined in Chapter 2) i.e. people involved in the MICE industry from all over Thailand. In an ideal sample, every member of the population has the same chance of selection, but this type of random sampling is uncommon. Gilbert (2001) suggests that there are two types of

sampling methods: probability and purposive. The sampling process in this phase applied purposive sampling (Lincoln and Guba, 2000). The purposive sampling or non-probability approach theory is generally used where all the cases belong to the same group or have the same characteristics. The approach enables an in-depth and detailed investigation of a particular social phenomenon (Ross, 2010). List of stakeholders were provided on the TCEB website, the MICE community website (thaimice.com), and TDMM website (Thailand Domestic MICE Mart). These websites included names, addresses, emails and telephone numbers of each organization. Before sending the survey, the researcher confirmed the contact details and the participants were informed about the purpose of the research. The sampling strategy used here was the purposive convenience method, which involves drawing a sample from the population of the current study (response rates are discussed in Chapter 6).

The online survey was conducted from January-May 2018, following the pilot study based on Dillman's (2002) approach. This period of online survey involved personal email invitations being sent out to all the participants, as well as an extensive follow-up process, aimed at obtaining the highest possible response rate. The researcher established a specific set of criteria to filter the details available on the websites listed above, including the need for the company to have an online presence, either through an up-to-date company website or active social media pages (Facebook) and the company have to have an active email address, as a means of ensuring that the company was still in the market and could participate in the research. 1,092 online questionnaires were sent out (detail in Chapter 7).

5.8.3 Questionnaire design and development

The questionnaire sought to encourage respondents to provide high-quality data. Thus, several aspects needed to be considered, including the choice of questions, format, the knowledge of participants about the study, their ability to understand the questions, and the piloting of the survey. Bryman (2015) states that when designing a questionnaire, researchers need to attend to the structure and nature of questions, to ensure that every potential respondent interprets the questions in the same manner and can respond accurately and willingly (Dillman 2014).

Clear wording is essential for both open and closed questions, so as not to lead respondents into particular answers (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). This is especially true for open questions. The use of Likert Scales is commonplace in closed questions, making questions easier to answer (Tonge and Moore, 2007; O'Leary and Deegan, 2005).

To ensure reliability and consistency, the questionnaire was checked by three different colleagues, who advised upon or revisited the wording and structure of the questionnaire. Academic readers of the questionnaire were valuable in assessing the survey for the use of language and structure, since they could draw from their own experiences of research. Feedback was gathered from different individuals until no further changes were deemed necessary. The questionnaire was then translated into Thai and proofread by two people in the Thai language for accuracy (Dillman, 2014).

As mentioned, the questions in the questionnaire were developed from the results of the interviews and consisted predominantly of closed questions, Likert-type scales, attitude response statements, ranking questions, and one open question. The answers to closed and scaling-questions are easy to process and more accessible in the pre-coding process, thus reducing the laborious task of analysis (Gilbert, 2001). The structure of the questionnaire is outlined below. The consent form was given to the participant, followed by an introduction to the study. The form informed the participants about the study and stated the purpose of the study and any issues concerning the participant (such as requirements for completing the questionnaire, ethics rules, and confidentiality). The questionnaire consisted of four sections.

* **Section 1: Respondent's information.** This section was designed to obtain descriptive information and individual factors associated with practitioners' experiences in the process of organizing meetings, incentives, conventions, and exhibitions.

* **Section 2: The importance of key success factors.** The aim of this section is to identify the level of importance of each factor from the practitioners' perspective. The questions were designed to ascertain the importance of each factor based on the adopted destination benchmarking model together with the findings from the qualitative research that influences the

development of the MICE industry. Each question used a five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) not important to (5) very important.

* **Section 3: Experiences of and opinions about the MICE cities.** Performance factors based on the same factors included in section 2 were listed together with findings from qualitative research, and practitioners were asked to identify the performance level of each factor for the MICE city they knew best in recent years. Each question used a five-point Likert scale from (1) not satisfied to (5) very satisfying.

* **Section 4: Open question** asking for any other related factors.

Table 5.5 below provides a summary of the survey questions and how they link to the BESTBET framework, along with additional factors derived from the first qualitative phase of the research. There are 15 questions based on the seven factors from the BESTBET framework and 6 questions developed from additional factors arising from the qualitative findings. This was deemed necessary due to the particular cultural characteristics of the field study location so that specific pre-existing and emergent factors were tested in a reliable and valid manner. For example, the section on the skills of workers included many components that the stakeholders might be concerned about such as experience, communication and workflow. A full copy of the questionnaire is included in Appendix B.

Table 5.5 Summary of questions

| BESTBET Factors | |
|-----------------|---|
| Leadership | Q1: Policies and subvention (financial or in-kind support from destination) Q2: Presentation or promoting the right image of the city as a excellent MICE city |
| Infrastructure | Q3: Transportation Q4: Quality of venue and facilities Q5: High standard of technology |
| Networking | Q6: Networking and communication |
| Bidding | Q7: The bidding process is reliable Q8: Supportive local relevant agencies in the city in the process of bidding |
| Ambassador | Q9: Symbol (represent the MICE city) |

| | |
|---|---|
| Skills | Q10: Experience and knowledge of workers in the MICE industry Q11: The availability and sufficiency of workers in the MICE industry Q12: Foreign languages Q13: Ability to communicate the workflow of the workers in the MICE industry Q14: Training course for working in the MICE industry |
| Branding | Q15: An awareness of what a MICE city is among local people |
| Additional Factors Derived from Phase 1 | Q16: Tourist attractions within the MICE city |
| | Q17: Reputation of the city |
| | Q18: Annual events in the MICE city |
| | Q19: Risk prevention |
| | Q20: Risk management |
| | Q21: One-stop service |

5.8.4 Piloting the Questionnaire

The questionnaire was written in Thai, so there were no translation issues. Nonetheless, the instrument needed to be tested, allowing the researcher to determine the adequacy of the questionnaire (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Sekaran and Bougie (2010) suggest that a pilot questionnaire should be conducted to check if the questions are understandable, the themes significant and the measurement items relevant. Gray (2009) suggests that a pilot ensures that questions can be comprehended and gives a chance to note any common misinterpretations or non-responses. Therefore, the questionnaires were checked with academics with expertise in the MICE industry from a Thai university, for accuracy and completeness. The researcher modified the questionnaire according to their feedback, which made the questions more precise and the questionnaire's structure easier to follow. Jennings (2010) suggests that in order to determine the effectiveness of the tool and its implementation, pilot studies should involve at least 50 participants. The responses collected from this did not show any major errors in the operation of the questionnaire, and preliminary checks on construct validity were positive. Further details of the pilot study are presented in Chapter 7.

5.8.5 Data collection

The data collection process in this study was made via email with the link to the survey included. The Bristol Online software allowed for a URL to be inserted into personalized emails, which directed participants to the online survey, as well as recording their results in one place. Dillman et al. (2014) suggest that follow-up emails be sent to respondents to remind them of the survey. After the pilot test, the main sample (n=1092) was carried out, sending details of the project and official letter, together with the link to the questionnaire. During the mail-out of the main questionnaire link, it became apparent that some email addresses were incorrect, and 147 email addresses were removed. Moreover, 21 automatic out-of-office emails were received, stating that the recipients were on leave. Therefore, the first stage of data collection resulted in 91 completed questionnaires. Dillman et al. (2014) state that questionnaires tend to be answered almost immediately and ones unanswered after more than a week are less likely to be returned. Therefore, after a week, the researcher started to contact respondents again to follow up and encourage a response, increasing the response rate to 126. Third and fourth emails, as well as a phone call, were made two weeks after the second email reminder. Cook and Thompson (2000) suggest that sending multiple contacts to potential web survey respondents is one of the most effective ways to increase the response rate. However, the reminder e-mail content needs to be edited in order to appeal to respondents and reduce the likelihood that the messages will be filtered out or disregarded (Dillman et al., 2014). The study obtained 266 completed questionnaires (response rate 30%). This response rate plays a significant role in the generalisability of the findings. Response rates for online questionnaires are recognized as lower than that of paper questionnaires (Deutskens, et al., 2004). Saunders et al. (2015) recognize that responses to business surveys conducted online can be as low as 10-20% due to response fatigue.

5.8.6 Data preparation and Data analysis

Analysis of the questionnaire data was conducted between November 2017 and April 2018. The questionnaires were downloaded from Bristol Online survey platform into Microsoft Excel, where data was checked and edited into

appropriate groups, allowing for comparisons to be drawn. Within this phase of the study, analysis focused firstly on descriptive statistics. This allows for simple patterns to be observed in the data relating to stakeholders' characteristics, and also allows for initial comparisons to be drawn between groups of businesses in the MICE sector. The main analysis technique used was importance performance analysis (IPA), as it allows for a comparison between importance and performance levels of each attribute. More detailed overview of analysis techniques is provided in the preceding sections.

5.8.7 Paired t-test

The paired t-test was conducted to confirmed a significant difference between importance scores and performance scores, as the paired t-test analysis measures the gaps between the importance and performance of a particular attribute (O'Neill and Palmer, 2004). Therefore, an individual paired-sample t-test confirmed a significant difference among the levels of importance of the attributes and their respective performance. Chen (2014) suggests that the results of gaps analysis could also be an effective means of benchmarking against competitors. Ka Lai and Hitchcock (2015) state that individual paired samples testing should only be conducted if the attributes show a significant difference ($p\text{-value} < 0.05$) and to highlight the areas that are respondents' actual concerns. Furthermore, the findings of the paired t-test also provide a set of priorities. The results of paired samples tests are then plotted in I-P mapping for further interpretation.

5.8.8 Interpreting the results of IPA

As outlined in Chapter 3, the IPA was introduced in 1977 by Martilla and James. Matzler, Sauerwein and Heischmidt (2003) indicated that the IPA technique is a tool that helps to identify and prioritize a set of factors. Likewise, Sampson and Showalter (1999) stated that IPA allows for the mobilization and deployment of scarce resources, and the harmonization of strategic planning efforts to enhance relative competitiveness (Matzler et al. 2004). Each attribute has an associated importance value, which, when taken with the performance value, prescribes an attribute improvement prioritization. For the avoidance of

doubt, it is not the intention of IPA to dictate that any factors that are not identified as ‘important’ be ignored or have attention or resourcing removed completely. Rather, IPA is a means for identifying factors where resource may be usefully redirected to other areas to provide an altogether stronger and more compelling proposition (Abalo et al., 2006; Sethna, 1982).

The IPA has been applied in several studies of tourism destinations. Importance Performance Analysis interprets the results, deepening understanding of the role of the key selected attributes and helping the researcher to prioritise certain attributes. The mean values of importance and performance scores are used as the crossing point in constructing the IPA grid (Oh, 2001). The actual mean values of the ratings or the scale mean for importance and performance can be used as cross-hair points in constructing the two-dimensional grid that divides the matrix into four quadrants, as shown in Figure 5.5. This presents the visual display of the results and potential strategic outcome. The ‘classical optimization’ interpretation (Eskildsen and Kristensen, 2006) is given by Martilla & James (1997).

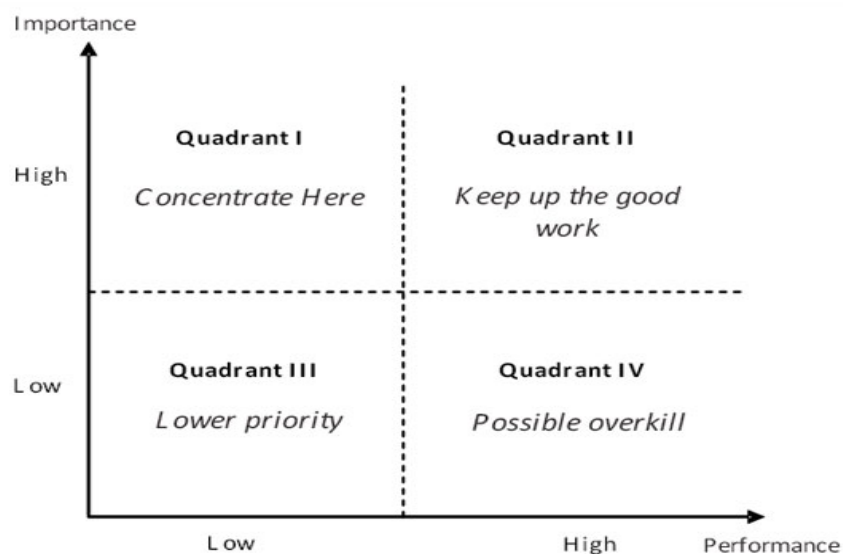


Figure 5.5: The Original IPA framework. (Source: Martilla and James, 1977)

Quadrant (I) High Important and Low Performance (Concentrate here): this quadrant requires immediate attention and is a major improvement attribute. The factors falling into this category are the most critical, showing how a business or destination fails to satisfy the customers’ expectations in areas they judge as noticeable. An inability to identify these attributes can impede a business’s place

in the market and typically results in low customer satisfaction. Policy changes and strategies should focus on directing marginal resources and extra effort to these factors.

Quadrant (II): High Importance and High Performance (Keep up the good work): the results from this quadrant indicate areas in which success is already being achieved. This quadrant contains significant strengths and potential competitive advantages, and (assuming the resources in this quadrant are already effectively allocated), this should be maintained.

Quadrant (III): Low Importance and Low Performance (Low Priority): this quadrant contains minor weaknesses that do not need to be prioritised. The attributes falling into this category do not represent an immediate competitive threat, and are of little significant to customers. There is no need for extra effort in this quadrant as it does not significantly improve performance.

Quadrant (IV): Low Importance and High Performance (Possible overkill): business resources committed to this area should be deployed elsewhere, as this area contains minor strengths that have minimum impact on the business or destination's relative competitiveness. In other words, these attributes represent an inefficient use of resources and should command the lowest priority for improvement. To enhance benefits, cost-cutting strategies should be considered, to release funds and effort to be redeployed where they are needed.

The IPA framework has been extensively applied to various aspects of the hospitality industry such as hotels, restaurants, tourism destinations, among others (e.g. Wade, Eagles and Wade, 2010). Policy-makers and management in MICE tourism have been using the IPA matrix to frame the relevant strategies to achieve competitive advantage over rivals. Some studies have attempted to apply the IPA in a destination to evaluate its image (Leary and Deegan, 2005; Litvin Joppe and Waalen, 2001); destination positioning (Pike and Ryan, 2004); and destination policy (Baloglu, 1999; Chu and Choi, 2000; Pike and Ryan, 2004). Lee, Choi and Breiter (2016) used IPA to investigate the status of MICE destinations and further indicate the strengths and weaknesses of a convention host city. Breiter and Milman (2006) applied the IPA technique to test the importance and performance of the majority of the facility services and features at a convention centre and identified attendees' needs and service priorities when attending an exhibition at such a centre. IPA analysis was also performed

to identify primary drivers of customer satisfaction and improve a set of priorities to focus on (Matzler et al., 2003). Zhang (1992) applied IPA analysis to determine the factors to which a city should devote its attention and resources to attract international meetings. Kozak (2002) suggests that there are a limited number of studies solely focused on measuring the performance of destinations and providing methods to improve it. Dealing with the different characteristics of each destination. Roberts and Tribe (2008) mention that there is no single perfect indicator for destination tourism and researchers need to develop site-specific indicators.

There are only a few instances where IPA methodology was explicitly applied to the combined framework of MICE destinations and benchmarking features to create a MICE destination-benchmarking tool. Tafesse et al. (2010) applied the IPA matrix to assess the performance of a trade show and evaluate a benchmarking tool in Japan. In doing so, the study applied IPA to identify significant differences between the performance expectations and perceived performance variables of the exhibition's activities. The findings suggest implications pertinent to the management of trade shows. IPA, when used as a performance evaluation tool, yields useful strategic insights for managers about the performance of several trade show activities (Tafesse et al., 2010). Thus, the IPA framework could be generalized as an effective technique for evaluating performance and develop as a benchmarking tool.

5.8.9 I-P mapping partitions

As mentioned, Martilla and James (1997) previously proposed that I-P mapping presents research results in four quadrants, with the means of the scale as the cross-points (as shown in Fig. 5.5). However, the authors found the limitation of the method to be simply crossing the axis at the middle point of both response scales. Thus, most attributes would be relocated in the upper right quadrant (keep up the good work), which means the IPA graph would suffer from low discriminative power and poor utility in terms of management. Therefore, the basic IPA graph was modified (Martilla and James, 1977; Alberty and Mihalik, 1989; Guadagnolo, 1985; Hollenhorst et al., 1992), increasing its discriminatory power. Other researchers use a data-centred approach, where the mean values

of perceived importance and performance ratings determine the cross-hair point of the IP matrix (e.g. Crompton and Duray, 1985; Deang et al., 2007; Hudson et al., 2004; Eskildsen and Kristensen, 2006).

Furthermore, Abalo et al., (2006) proposed a further modification to the IPA approach by incorporating the concept of discrepancy (Sethna, 1982). This was computed as simply the difference between performance and importance, to the graphical representation of the IPA. The researchers applied a diagonal line to the IPA graph, and the distance from each point to this diagonal line is considered (Fig 5.6). The diagonal line connects all points where performance matches importance, thus indicating no discrepancy. Those elements placed above the diagonal would have a negative discrepancy and those below, a positive discrepancy, indicating the user's level of satisfaction/dissatisfaction. This approach has been used in many studies, separating regions of differing priorities in which the region above the line represents a high priority (Abalo et al., 2006; Sethna, 1982), but importantly remembering that the region below does not represent factors to be forgotten or ignored. Hollenhorst and Fortney (1992) set the experiential means that conducted the difference between importance and performance obtained from the data set as the cross-points (Fig 5.7). Bacon (2003) mentioned the 'data-centered quadrants approach', and this model is accepted as the most accurate model.

Regardless of how the IPA grid is distributed, the quadrant approach groups the importance and performance of individual factors inflexibly into four categories. The portion approach is problematic in distinguishing between the factors positioned in the same region (Tarrant and Smith, 2002). Bacon (2003) agreed, observing that the distinctive problem in the quadrant approach could be difficult to identify an precisely priority area. Thus, a small change in the position of an attribute may significantly change the main conditional concern. It can be seen that the researcher can conduct different I-P mapping approaches and use flexible diagonal line models to modify the interpretation of their data (Slack, 1994). Fig 5.8 shows a flexible data-centred diagonal line model. In order to maintain market position, the business usually plans a strategy based on their resources. Therefore, the size of the 'keep up the good work' quadrant should be extended in order to fully utilize available resources.

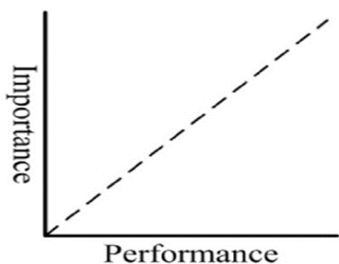


Fig. 5.6. Diagonal line model quadrants approach

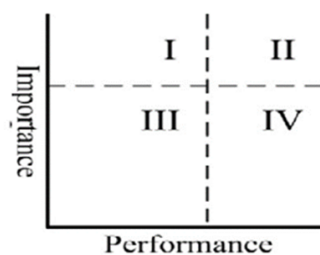
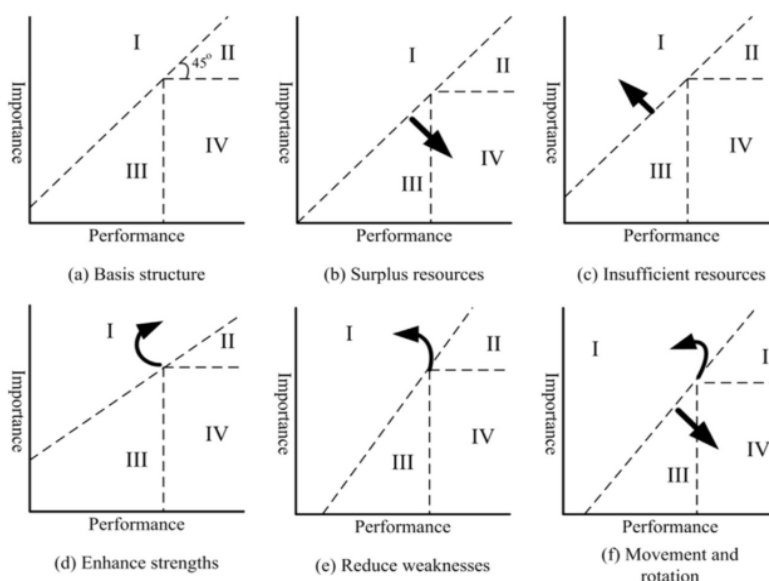


Fig. 5.7. Data-centered

As noted in the IPA literature, the scale-centred, data-centred quadrant approaches and the diagonal methods are widely used in a variety of contexts, while their predictive validity is rarely examined. The choice of research design varies depending on different research setting the researcher’s objectives, as it is hard to develop a unique research framework suitable for all the situations. Researchers still need to plan the research framework and consider the reliability and validity of each study (Bacon 2003; Ka et al., 2015; Ernest and Nash, 2013).

From the literature on IPA, it can be observed that there is no particular approach that distinguishes itself in addressing validity concerns (Lai and Hitchcock, 2015). However, there are many studies that have attempted to provide practical guidelines for the IPA approach.

Fig 5.8 Flexible data-centred diagonal line model



Source: Importance-performance analysis in tourism: A framework for researchers (Ka, Lai and Hitchcock, 2015).

Due to the complexity of the equations, this research chose to follow the means and diagonal line model suggested by Rial, Varela and Real (2008). The discrepancy of the attributes (distance to the diagonal) is considered an indicator for prioritizing the improvement of product and service. Consequently, to address the research aim of the study, the means and diagonal line model has been applied (Rial et al., 2008).

5.8.10 Quality of Data (Reliability and Validity)

Similar to phase one, the quantitative study took measures to ensure the quality of data. Reliability in this phase of the research was concerned with the extent to which measures from an instrument or construct are internally consistent (Pallant, 2013). The internal consistency and reliability of scales in quantitative studies are frequently tested by calculating Cronbach's alpha coefficient and range from 0 to 1 (Pallant, 2013). Alpha coefficients can be used to rate the reliability of factors from either dichotomous or multi-point questions (i.e., Likert-type scales). The benchmark typically quoted for the social sciences was recommended by Pallant (2013), who suggests that a score of ≥ 0.50 is sufficient evidence of internal reliability. She goes on to note that scores of ≥ 0.70 suggest strong item covariance (see Chapter 7).

Furthermore, there are several issues concerned with reliability and data collection processes. These errors could happen at any time during the research and are as follows: (i) participant error, which could occur during an interview; (ii) participant bias, which may occur when participants might not give their honest opinion but rather their perception of the 'right' answer; and (iii) observer error, which might occur through having more than one researcher interpret the data of the study because the interpretation very much depends on the researchers. However, this error did not apply to this current study because the study was carried out by a single person (Robson, 2002). Veal (2006) suggests that a mixed method study is an excellent way to gain trustworthiness and enhance the validity and reliability of collected data. As qualitative and quantitative methods are conducted together within one study, both methods could obtain more validity than a single approach, with the smaller size limiting its generalisability (Saunders and Thornhill, 2012). This is supported by Gray

(2009), who notes that quantitative research that is designed based on qualitative outcomes can significantly increase the validity of the study.

Sudman and Bradburn (1982) found that questionnaires were better than interviews when dealing with the issue of bias in questions. The Bristol software allows respondents to return to the survey later (for example, if they lose their internet connection), which also has the advantage that respondents could review their previous answers before proceeding with the remaining questions, and this helped in gaining an honest answer from the respondents. Moreover, the software allows us to detect if the participant has completed all the questions.

Validity, on the other hand, refers to the issue of whether an indicator (or set of indicators) that is devised to gauge whether a concept really measures that concept. Bryman (2016) suggests that face validity is the minimum a researcher who develops a new measure should establish. Face validity might be established by asking other people whether the measure seems to be getting at the concept of interest (Bryman, 2016). In other words, people with experience or expertise in a field might be asked to act as judges to determine whether on the face of it the measure seems to reflect the concept concerned (Bryman, 2016). Validity is also concerned with the integrity of the conclusions generated from a piece of research (Bryman and Bell, 2015). It is often held that validity depends upon reliability (Gray, 2009), and if so, we must be confident in the reliability of our findings. Establishing the face or content validity of a construct is the minimum a researcher can do to create validity (Bryman, 2016). At face value, the measures achieved high content validity. In this study, content validity is attained by a subjective, systematic evaluation of the correspondence between individual indicators of the constructs and the concepts of importance and performance through conducting pretesting and piloting procedures and expert assessment (Bryman, 2016). Furthermore, construct validity and the criteria used to determine the construct validity are convergent, discriminant, and predictive evaluations. Convergent validity is commonly used in texts to examine the extent to which different measures of the same concepts are harmonized with each other (Bryman and Cramer, 2003).

To test validity, this study used the importance and performance analysis technique to test for a correlation or gap between elements. Although discriminant validity is an important aspect of the validation process, this study

focuses more on convergence and nomological validity. Nomological or predictive validity involves examining the degree to which a measure makes accurate predictions on a criterion measure that it should theoretically be able to predict (Malhotra and Birks, 2003). In this study, an overall measure of relative usefulness factors to the development of the MICE sector, and a direct measure of priority, were introduced to ascertain nomological validity, using a paired samples t-test (see also Chapter 7).

5.9 Ethics and Confidentiality

Ethical issues can occur at a variety of stages during social research, as well as through a variety of methods, and are significant matters that can bring into question the integrity of the research (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Ethical approval was granted by Aberystwyth University upon submission by the researcher of a Research Ethics Assessment and Application form. In the process of the research design, the researcher considered that the research findings should benefit the individuals being studied. The research questions were therefore designed to cover the research purpose and give details about the project. The researcher's effort was always to be aware of investigation ethics during the fieldwork. First, the participants were volunteers and could withdraw at any time. Importantly, the nature and purpose of the study was clearly stated and a consent form (see appendix B) was obtained at the start of each interview. Furthermore, this study was designed to comply with the Economic and Social Research Council Framework for Research Ethics (ESRC, 2015). The framework is comprised of six core principles, notably that research should be voluntary, free of harm to participants, established around informed consent, anonymous, credible and free of conflicts of interest. It is widely accepted in any study that the researcher has a responsibility to ensure that participants are not harmed. As mentioned, this project makes use of mixed methods. The first phase is qualitative, making use of interviews. The researcher identified the extent of time and the potential impact in advance, as well as supplying draft interview questions. The researcher addressed confidentiality, and research findings will only be used in this study. In the second phase, a quantitative approach was used, in the form of an online survey. The Bristol online study allowed for confidentiality principles to be adhered to and the anonymity of

responses to be achieved. It was noted that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any point without harm or penalty.

Siber (1998) states that once data has been analyzed, it needs to be kept for a reasonable period (5-10 years) and protected. The researcher needs to attend to this issue after completing their work. Berg (2001) highlights that the researcher needs to provide an accurate account of the information and its analysis. Therefore, the accuracy of the data should be checked with the participants or across different data sources. The final process is writing up and completing the final research report. This study was designed to present the findings in line with the standards of the American Psychological Association, which includes three principles: modern unbiased language at an appropriate level of specificity; sensible terminology to label the findings; and use of appropriate terms. The findings need to be presented in such a way as to meet the researcher's and the readers' needs. However, the researcher needs to be aware not to prejudice the process, through suppressing, falsifying, or inventing findings (Neuman, 1991).

5.10 A reflexive researcher in the field

Conducting research (and fieldwork in particular) changes a researcher in many ways. The journey of discovering how research is shaped and how the research process and output shapes researchers is an iterative and empowering process (Palaganas and Sanchez, 2017). Reflexive research could be a tool to monitor or even audit the research process (Finlay, 2002), by asking the researcher to consider how the subject is approached, examining the reasons for approaching the subject from our particular angle and with the chosen methodology. Therefore, reflexivity should reflect the position and point of view of the researcher, and should be recognized as a significant part of the research findings. Reflexivity could also help the researcher deal with issues that arise from the fieldwork, particularly in the case of qualitative research, which may spark powerful or disturbing emotions (Doyle, 2013).

Qualitative research is, by nature, a reflective and recursive process (Ely et al., 1991), as the process is built on an acknowledgment of the ideological and historical power that dominant forms of inquiry exert over the researcher

and research. In other words, reflexivity is an attempt to identify and acknowledge the limitations of research, such as the data collection process, location, theoretical context, data analysis and how accounts recognize that the construction of knowledge takes place in the world and not apart from it (Shacklock & Smyth, 1998). However, Levesque and Maybery (2012) argue that this process may be biased and that it may not be realistic to completely back away from the researcher's presuppositions. They state that reflexivity in research is a part of being honest and ethically mature in research practice, and that a researcher should not attempt to be objective, as this may not acknowledge the interests implicit in a critical agenda for the research, or to assume a value-free position of neutrality, as this may cause them to assume an absent or dishonest position. The current study attempted to strictly adhere to principles of ethical research in every step, as explained above.

Although this research aims to support the industry by consulting those within it, not all those contacted could see the benefits of participating. At the point in the process at which the invitation emails were sent out during the pilot study, the researcher introduced herself as a PhD candidate and the response rate was meagre. Once she subsequently got in contact via a formal letter that identified her as a lecturer at Thailand University, the response rate was much better. Moreover, she received help from some people who were happy to forward the questionnaire to others that they thought might be suitable participants. Similar obstacles were encountered in the interview process and at times some participants were not confident to answer my questions and might start to ask me questions instead. Some email was rejected because MICE is a new thing for them and they do not think they will be able to give a useful answer, or there is only one person who knows about MICE in the company and he/she was away. Chew-Graham, May and Perry (2002) noted when interviewing someone who is a member of the same profession or knows the interviewer in a professional context that access may be easier, yet prior knowledge can affect the way the research is perceived. Thus, it can be assumed that the role of the researcher and the importance of the research aims have a significant impact on the social control and direction of research.

Qualitative research cannot avoid empathetic connections between researchers and participants, as without these it would be possible to gain a

superficial understanding of participants' experiences only (Cain, 2012). This could be why qualitative research could lead researchers into over-emotional involvement, and it is common for a researcher within this methodological area to experience distress during or following fieldwork (Cain, 2012; Kleinman and Copp, 1993). During this study, the researcher sometimes faced feelings of loneliness and sadness, for example when an invitation was rejected or a participant cancelled an appointment after the travel had been arranged. Sadness during fieldwork is usual at some stages of a PhD, in the process of turning 'methods of constructing the research object back on themselves' (Fries, 2009, p.326). Fitzpatrick and Olson (2015) consider the value of reflecting on our emotional experiences for generating logical insight. These emotions were motivating, however, pushing the researcher to work harder, and in future these experiences will hopefully also contribute to her own practice of supervising PhD students.

5.11 Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the research design, methodology, and methods developed for this study. It discusses some philosophical approaches pertinent to an inquiry on tourism study and provides a rationale for its methodological stance based on postpositivist assumptions and a mixed method approach. It proposes a two-phase sequential approach as an effective strategy to address the research problem and achieve the study's objectives.

The research design for the current study needed to be able to address the central research questions, which investigate the essential factors to attend to in order to develop a MICE destination benchmarking tool in the Thai context, based on the BESTBET framework. The current study will also seek to understand how these factors impact on the site selection of stakeholders in the MICE industry. In order to achieve the aim of the study and investigate the research questions, both a qualitative and quantitative study method was selected. The methodology and techniques used at each stage of the inquiry are treated in separate sections.

Chapter 6 Qualitative findings

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide the interview results based on the BESTBET framework (leadership, networking, infrastructure, bidding, ambassadors, branding, and skills). The findings from the interviews will, firstly, identify which factors are suggested by the BESTBET framework. The second section of this chapter presents the results of the interviews regarding the factors drawn from the literature review and the BESTBET framework. This chapter, therefore, provides the findings from the qualitative study to present a better understanding of what factors are related to BESTBET and what new elements have emerged.

6.2 Interviews

Thirty-one interviews were conducted (the participants' profiles were presented in Chapter 5) between January 2017 and June 2017. On average, interviews lasted 25-50 minutes and took place at the office of the participants, who made arrangements for a quiet, undisturbed meeting. The research collected data from stakeholders in the MICE industry, with the primary reasons being that it is stakeholders who are responsible for executing government policy on MICE sector strategies; it is stakeholders who seek to provide facilities and infrastructure to create so-called MICE destinations; and that the study seeks to understand the usefulness of a MICE destination concept. Therefore data was collected from stakeholders rather than "users". The interviews aimed to assist the researcher to investigate the BESTBET framework in a Thai context and analyze meaning in a consistent way. The participants were asked questions about their personal experience in MICE destinations and MICE industry; factors that influenced the development of MICE city; issues that need to be considered in a MICE city; and factors drawn from the BESTBET framework.

Every effort was made to encourage the participants to talk freely and openly in order to gain understanding and insight into their perspectives. This included ensuring the questions were unambiguous, and the researcher clarified words or ideas with the interviewees to ensure responses were recorded

accurately. Creswell (2003) suggests that it is necessary to record an interview to correctly and faithfully render the participants' views. At the end of the interview, the researcher summarized the information obtained from the interview, to further ensure the information provided had been correctly recorded and accurately expressed the participants' ideas.

As mentioned in Chapter 5, the ramifications of choosing a data analysis technique depend on the nature of the research and the research's paradigmatic approach (Kachel and Jennings, 2010). The current study applied pattern-matching as a tool to interpret the data (Yin, 2014; Saunders et al., 2016), as the pattern-matching technique involves predicting a pattern of outcomes based on theoretical propositions to explain the data. As Chapter 5 indicated, the aim of applying the technique was to evaluate the relevance and usefulness of a destination benchmarking tool (BESTBET), and then perhaps to modify or propose a new framework for a specific context. Yin (2014) suggests utilizing existing theory and then testing the adequacy of the framework deductively as a means to explain findings. If the pattern of data matches that which has been predicted through the conceptual framework, then an explanation has been found and possible threats to the validity of the conclusions can be discounted.

Therefore, pattern-matching was applied, due to its thoroughness and relative straightforwardness. Qualitative data analysis started with the researcher listening to each recorded interview as soon as possible after the interview, to make notes and highlight important ideas (Nigel and Hilary 2001). Edwards (2011) suggests that managing and sorting data needs to start as soon as evidence begins to accumulate. Yin (2014) suggests the first step after completing the qualitative data collection is the process of making sense of the materials. Likewise, the current study started by transcribing all the interviews after listening to the entire tape, then coding the concepts based on the BESTBET framework and literature review. The BESTBET framework only comprised seven factors; in order to gain a deeper an understanding, the study has included relevant elements from the literature review (see Chapter 4). Each element was then matched with the BESTBET framework and new elements that emerged from the interview were highlighted (see Table 6.2). Saunders et al. (2016) suggests that pattern-matching is helpful in developing a conceptual or analytical framework that is developed from existing theory. This step

permitted the researcher to compare and contrast themes and concepts, which could help to capture thoughts and write up the results (Gilbert, 2001).

6.3 Participants' profiles

MICE requires a variety of different skills, as explained in section 2.7 (Davidson, 1994). Consequently, in order to cover all the different perspectives in the MICE industry, the current study has tried to collect data from various sections of the MICE industry (Table 6.1).

Table 6.1 Participants' profiles

| Number of participants | Type of business | Position | City |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|------------|
| 2 | Government/Trade Associations | Direct Manager | Bangkok |
| 2 | Event planner | Manager/staff | Bangkok |
| 1 | Hotel | Staff | Bangkok |
| 1 | Venue | Manager | Bangkok |
| 2 | Government/Trade Associations | Manager | Chiang Mai |
| 1 | Travel agency | Staff | Chiang Mai |
| 2 | Hotel | Manager | Chiang Mai |
| 2 | Spa | Manager | Chiang Mai |
| 2 | Event planner | Staff | Chiang Mai |
| 2 | Hotel | Manager/staff | Khon Kaen |
| 1 | Venue | Manager | Khon Kaen |
| 1 | Travel agency | Manager | Khon Kaen |
| 2 | Government/Trade Associations | Manager | Khon Kaen |
| 2 | Event planner | Staff, Manager | Khon Kaen |
| 1 | Government/Trade Associations | Staff | Pattaya |
| 1 | Travel agency | Staff | Pattaya |
| 2 | Hotel | Staff | Pattaya |
| 2 | Event planner | Manager/staff | Phuket |
| 2 | Government/Trade Associations | Staff | Phuket |

Accordingly, it is more important to include ideas from many different perspectives in the industry rather than to achieve equal representation from

each MICE destination. Furthermore, the reflections and experiences of the stakeholders in several areas can gain real and valid information.

6.4 Critical success factors (BESTBET)

Participants were asked about their organization, job position, type of business, performance of the company in the last five years, their target market, and how long the business has operated. They were then asked to identify the factors that they considered key to the success of developing MICE cities based on the BESTBET framework. Explanations for each factor were provided during the interview as well as issues that the participants raised.

Qualitative results are initially presented in the context of the BESTBET framework. This began with an understanding of MICE and MICE cities from the participants' perspectives, to confirm that the participant has knowledge of MICE and understands the importance of the MICE industry and MICE cities. The results from the investigation of the factors that related to the BESTBET framework were followed with the new factors found in a Thai context. This allows a variety of factors associated with the developing of MICE city to be considered, alongside the reasons why these factors are essential.

6.4.1 MICE Definition

As noted in Chapter 2, there is a lack of well-defined terminology on MICE or business and event tourism. To achieve this study's aims, it was seen as important to achieve a better understanding of the key stakeholders in terms of their perceptions and definitions of MICE, as contrasted with their understanding of leisure tourism and business tourism. Furthermore, this also enabled a comparison of definitions of leisure tourism and MICE or business tourism, as discussed in Chapter 2. Some participants observed that:

MICE travellers are people who travel to destinations to attend an event and who have explored the areas after their work while attending such events. The trip needs the same group of service providers to make it complete.

(Event planner, Phuket)

MICE people are people who travel for work and leisure at the same time, especially the incentive group. They all need almost the same

facilities and services such as transportation, accommodation, and entrainment.

(Event planner, Khon Kaen)

Therefore, I think both (work and leisure) have something in common, even though the purpose of both trips are different.

(Travel agency, Chiang Mai)

I consider the MICE travellers are traveling more for the holiday as they have a chance to go away from their routine work to visit a different place. This means they could have some time off and relax after the meeting or conference. Thus 'business tourist or work and travel' are the perfect definitions for MICE travellers.

(Hotel, Pattaya)

MICE is good for the people who travel for work but also need the time to relax afterward; they will use the [same] necessary products and services as the other tourists.

(Travel agency, Phuket)

It seems like the concepts of MICE and leisure could be distinguished based on the purpose of the trip. There is a link between two different journeys as the MICE group could participate in leisure activities after work. However, as the primary purpose of the MICE travellers is for work, some specific products and services are demanded by this group. As some participants indicated, some elements need to be the focus.

Working for the MICE travellers requires more details and information than other travellers. I think because they need more than just a holiday. For instance, when arranging the transportation a strict regime is in place, for instance, we need to make sure that it is booked on time. The accommodation should not be too far from the venue of the meeting hall as well.

(Travel agency, Bangkok)

I presume that most of the time the MICE travellers has been provided a high standard of products and services by their work, such as stay in a better hotel, eat at the proper restaurant, and of course an excellent meeting room with great facilities. Because they are less sensitive about money, therefor I think the MICE travellers demand is a bit more than the leisure travellers.

(Event planner, Chiang Mai)

Because the city has been promoting as a MICE city, the need for 5-star hotels is put into consideration. This might be because the MICE travellers will want better accommodation with excellent service. As

well as the services for, the shuttle bus from the convention or accommodation to the hotel will need to improve.
(Government/Trade Associations, Khon Kaen)

The comments above could be explained as prioritising links between products and services demanded by the MICE group and the leisure group. Likewise, the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 discussed similar needs for products and services with leisure and MICE travellers. Nonetheless, more is required by the MICE group. Chapter 2 illustrated the characteristics of each type of tourist as well as the relationship between them. Swarbrooke and Horner (2001) specify that MICE travellers often pay more, but still use the same airports or hotels. However, a better quality of service or extra specialist facilities may be more likely to be requested compared with the leisure tourist. Moreover, the current study found that MICE travellers are more concerned with safety and security than those in other tourism sectors, as a few participants observed:

Not long after the tsunami happened in the south of Thailand years ago, probably 2 or 3 years later many leisure travellers started to come back to Thailand again, unlike the MICE traveller. I assumed that MICE travellers require long-term planning to make sure that Thailand has a better system in warning of this kind of crisis.
(Government/Trade Associations, Phuket)

At the time that Phuket had the tsunami, most of the MICE groups who had booked with us cancelled the trip and moved to somewhere else. At that time our company survived on the leisure group and wedding groups. It took more than five years [before] I could gain the trust from my old customers to come back to Phuket. Therefore, I think the MICE traveller is very serious about safety and security more than any other group.
(Event planner, Phuket)

These comments show that the participants perceive the MICE traveller to be more concerned about safety and security, perhaps because the MICE traveller has been sponsored by their company, so before agreeing to send their staff to a meeting or conference, the company needs to ensure that the destination is safe (Campiranon and Kom, 2006).

6.4.2 MICE cities

Key stakeholders were also asked about their understanding of MICE cities and the characteristics of MICE cities that have been promoted by the TCEB. Explanations of what is meant by a MICE city varied, as destinations are amalgams of tourism products and services, and the MICE city has been considered from different aspects depending on the integrated experience offered to visitors. (Kozak and Rimmington, 1999). Traditionally, destinations are regarded as well-defined geographical areas (Davidson and Maitland, 1997):

Well, I guess from the cities that have been promoted Chiang Mai, Khon Kaen, Pattaya, Phuket, and Bangkok as a MICE city by TCEB, I think [a] MICE city probably is [the] capital city of each region of Thailand.
(Travel agency, KhonKaen)

I think because of the location of the four regions that each MICE city that TCEB promote, such as Chiang Mai or Khon Kaen, then this is good for the MICE traveller to go all around the country.
(Hotel, Pattaya)

I think the reason why Khon Kaen has been selected to be promoted as a MICE city is that the city is in the middle of the Northeast of Thailand. The city is not too far from Bangkok and not far from Laos. This is very handy for an exhibitor like me and especially easy for a logistics company.
(Event planner, Khon Kaen)

The main criteria here is the location of each MICE city, for example, Pattaya is not far from Bangkok, so I think each MICE city provides easy accessibility. The rest such as accommodation or other services could always improve later on.
(Government/Trade Associations, Pattaya)

However, as a tourism product a destination is increasingly recognized as a perceptual concept that can be interpreted subjectively by consumers, depending on their travel itinerary and purpose of visit (Davidson, 2000). Services and facilities also need to meet the visitors' expectation (Gilbert, 2001; Cooper et al., 1998). Likewise, most of the participants agreed that a MICE city should be one that meets MICE traveller needs. This is supported by the discussion in the previous section as to what these needs might be.

Each MICE city has the capability of providing the things that the MICE people need and expect for their working efficiency such as facilities, a

good transportation system, appropriate venues, staff with specific skills, and it will be great to have tourist attractions to explore after the events.

(Event planner, Bangkok)

Each MICE city can provide basic needs such as five-star hotels, great venues; on top of that, we are lucky as we have stunning beaches. Therefore, the MICE cities for me are the cities where they can provide the facilities for the meetings, attractions or entertainment, which are all convenient for this target group.

(Event planner, Phuket)

The MICE city should be the city that can host a variety of meetings or events. It means that MICE cities should have everything that requires for the MICE traveller, both domestic and international groups.

(Government/Trade Associations, Chiang Mai)

Destinations could also consider the brand image of the destination. Leiper (1995) explains that destinations are places to which people travel and where they choose to stay for a while in order to experience certain features or characteristics, and thus they must have a perceived attraction of some sort.

[A] MICE city is the city that could attract MICE travellers. There could be many reasons why MICE people want to visit, for example, Phuket as I am sure everyone wants to visit Phuket, as we know Phuket is a paradise that provides sun and sand.

(Travel agency, Phuket)

As we know, the city is famous without promoting I suppose. I think because the city has easy access as it is not far from Bangkok. Moreover, we also have plenty of luxury hotels with a high standard of service and a great nightlife. Moreover, we offer plenty of activities that could attract MICE traveller[s].

(Hotel, Pattaya)

The idea of [a] MICE city for me is easy to access; we have enough standard accommodation, high standard venues and potential to develop into a MICE city. More importantly, is, the city should have its uniqueness such as culture, tourist attraction and so on.

(Event planner, Khon Kaen)

I think Khon Kaen is now an 80% MICE city as I can see it growing up systematically following the policy. Nevertheless, the public utility still needs to improve such as public transportation and five-star hotels.

(Event planner, Khon Kaen)

From the interviews, it appears that the stakeholders understand what a MICE city is and why Bangkok, Phuket, Khon Kaen, Pattaya and Chiang Mai have

been chosen to be promoted as a MICE cities: the comments above reflect the location of the cities, the ability of the city to provide a suitable standard of products and services for the MICE group, and the attraction of the city for MICE travellers. However, some people had questions about the need to specify the cities, as can be seen below.

I think the limit of five MICE cities should not be the case as I believe every city could be a MICE city. Consequently, every city has a different strong point and its unique characteristics, which could attract a diverse group of people. In my opinion, there is no MICE city but everywhere could be a MICE city as long as they can arrange an event.
(Travel agency, Pattaya)

Meetings and incentive [trips] could be held in many cities in Thailand; I do not think it is necessary to be just in MICE city since most of the meetings and conferences happen in hotels anyway.
(Hotel, Khon Kaen)

The differentiation between leisure tourism and MICE tourism was addressed in Chapter 2, but tourist attractions in the city are considered important for both groups of travellers. Uanasa-ard and Binprathan (2018) talk of the opportunity for the MICE industry of Thailand, because of the country's charm, innovative service industry, good food, beautiful beaches and year-round warmth. Furthermore, the country also provides a wide range of amenities to facilitate MICE events, boasting some of the highest standards in the industry, especially in the MICE cities (TCEB, 2013). Therefore, there was an emphasis from respondents that there are differences between tourism cities and MICE cities in terms of the levels of facilities and amenities essential to the MICE traveller.

6.5 BESTBET factors

6.5.1 Leadership

The next series of questions were about operation and management in MICE cities, to assess whether leadership has an impact on the MICE sector and MICE city development from the participants' perspectives. Also, it allowed participants to reflect on their perceptions of the policies and support from leadership. The question allowed the researcher to detect if each MICE city has the same policies and structure in their management, as well as assessing the communication, cooperation, and commitment within each destination, as the literature from Chapter 2 indicated leadership in the MICE sector needs to produce clear policies and communications. Interviewees were also asked about the perceived relevance and importance of leadership in the MICE industry. In the broader sense of management, system leadership is seen to be a whole system and policies rather than a person, but the management structure and the leader of each MICE city is different:

I am sure we all realized that the MICE industry has grown up a lot over the years and everybody seems excited and up for it. However, I think we are all working under the TCEB's lead because I believe that MICE is a new thing for all of us.
(Event planner, Khon Kaen)

We have good teamwork with a robust creation as our team involves people from different sections such as academia, MICE planners, and local government.
(Government/Trade Associations, Chiang Mai)

I am not sure who the leader of MICE in this city is, we do not contact anybody as we only focus on selling the function rooms. Moreover, I am not sure if we need a leader, but maybe a policy of promoting and advertising of the city more would be beneficial.
(Hotel, Pattaya)

Unsurprisingly, most of the participants agreed that TCEB had been the leader of the MICE cities of Thailand. Their policies are considered guidelines for stakeholders and new businesses particularly.

I think TCEB is the leading organization, which is the leader in our MICE city because since we are working on following the roadmap and strategies that are provided by TCEB.
(Event planner, Khon Kaen)

TCEB play an essential role in order to develop Pattaya to become a MICE city. We did not really know what MICE was until the TCEB came and arranged the meetings and training courses for both the business sector and the academic sector. TCEB came from time to time and helped us learn about the industry and how to prepare Pattaya to be ready for MICE.

(Government/Trade Associations, Pattaya)

Well, TCEB has a guideline and even project plans for us, we just have to work on the plan that they send to us.

(Government/Trade Associations, Phuket)

It is clear that the TCEB has a great effect as a leader, since the TCEB is the only public organization responsible for promoting and developing business events in Thailand. However, some participants realized that local leaders are also prominent: cities have followed the guidelines provided by TCEB but there are various ways to apply these, depending on the resources in each area.

We are lucky that our provincial governor has a very good vision of the MICE industry. He has realized that the MICE industry could bring a huge benefit to our city. The apparent project is that we are the first city to start as a “smart city” as the TCEB has supported us in many ways such as ideas, strategies, and even financial support.

(Event planner, Khon Kaen)

I really hope we will continue developing the city as a MICE city as we are doing now. I am a bit worried as the leader we have now is going to retire in the next two months. I really hope a new one would agree with what we are doing and want to keep working with the entire project we have planned.

(Event planner, Khon Kaen)

For me leadership in MICE is [provided by the] TCEB as the organization has been influencing our business and related service providers in many ways, especially in marketing plans and activities.

(Event planner, Chiang Mai)

I am not sure if we have leadership apart from the TCEB as nowadays we work on projects that mainly is from TCEB, so TCEB is considered as a very important [source of] leadership in the MICE industry.

(Government/Trade Associations, Pattaya)

From these comments, it appears that leadership (a factor derived from the BESTBET framework) is important in a Thai context. Given this subjective evidence provided by participants, it was seen as important to confirm that leadership is an important factor in developing MICE cities. We presume that leadership in a Thai context was conceptualized similarly as in a UK context i.e.

it was government bodies that people in both locations referred to as providing 'leadership'.

The management system in MICE city was also observed to be important. It was felt that the local government should have more responsibility in development than just following the TCEB policy. Also, as one participant mentioned, having TCEB involved was not always a good thing.

TCEB has been involved in our business a lot lately, well I do not say it wrong, but it made me work harder, since we need to change some aspects in order to meet the policy from TCEB. As well as, the city has been promoted as a MICE city, so the competitors are not just local but from all over the country.

(Event planner, Chiang Mai)

It would be great if the local government or the local event stakeholder could be more independent and know more about what is going on in the city. [It is] as much I could do now to put more effort and ensure that our business will still run and remain in the market.

(Event planner, Khon Kaen)

The question sought to identify issues of operation and management in MICE cities and found that leadership and policy are important factors. However, policy aside, it could also be argued that the MICE city campaign may not provide benefits for everyone. Indeed, it is possible that the MICE city campaign may put some businesses in a more difficult situation. Another key point appears to be associated with how companies communicate about the complicated and unclear structure of leadership and management systems.

I am not sure if the MICE city campaign benefits my business, I do not know about the others, but for me, I feel like it is more complicated since MICE city happened. Even [though] we have the Khon Kaen MICE Management (KKMM) association; the association aimed to drive the MICE industry in this city. However, we are still not clear who is the director of the group and also the more explicit roles and responsibilities.

(Event planner, Khon Kaen)

We do not really need a supportive form of government as we have run our businesses for a long time with the experience and good performance that we have. We should be OK on our own as long as nothing changes (I mean policies or rules).

(Event planner, Phuket)

I think most of the companies in Phuket are very good with what they do as they have been working in the industry for a long time. Some

companies have even been operating longer than MICE and TCEB. Therefore, I think they do not want or care what a MICE city or what TCEB's policy is.
(Government/Trade Associations, Phuket)

The results from the interviews about leadership confirmed that the main leadership of the MICE industry and MICE city in Thailand comes from the TCEB, as well as a majority of the policies on MICE city development. From the stakeholder perspective, 'leadership' mainly referred to CVBs or the TCEB. A few statements highlight that local support from local government was also important. Fawzy (2008) found support from CVBs and local government to be a critical factor in convention site selection. Some participants observed that local government and local stakeholders should be freer to create their own policy and strategy to ensure that the policy is suitable for the context of the city and relevant workers.

6.5.2 Infrastructure

Section 4.2 provided a definition of infrastructure in terms of the BESTBET framework, which is related to facilities and services needed within the MICE industry, such as transportation, accommodation, suitable venues and technology. Infrastructure factors have been found in almost every study and therefore, infrastructure is often considered as a principal criterion in the process of site selection for event planners. The TCEB (2012) consider facilities in terms of whether there is sufficient accommodation, suitable levels of technology, and suitable venues. Chen and Lin (2010) found a few additional elements of facilities, which included conference rooms, professional video facilities, and audio facilities had an impact on attendees' satisfaction.

The interviews undertaken for the current study found infrastructure/facilities to be a primary key success factor of developing a MICE city, particularly public transport, which has played an important role in the context of sustainability and efficiency (Kuo & Tang, 2011). The participants mentioned that visitors need to be able to access the city easily. Unsurprisingly, most of the cities selected for promotion as MICE destinations in Thailand have an international airport. Furthermore, road transportation was found to be a primary consideration. Ongkittikul and Thongphat (2018) agreed that road transportation had become the most significant sector for the economy for many

regions in Thailand. Public transportation in a MICE city context includes buses, taxis, city buses and *songtaews*, trains, sky trains, subways, tuk-tuks, motorcycle taxis and vans. A private company in the local area has dominated the public transportation in each MICE city for some years. The interviews suggested some issues that should be managed to set a standard for a transportation system in terms of cost and service. From the stakeholders' perspective, there are issues, such as unstable costs, poor timetabling and traffic jams.

Public transportation in the city is difficult to plan as the exact times and costs are hard to estimate. Many of our clients complained about the cost which is changing all the time.
(Travel agency, Phuket)

As we know, Bangkok is more convenient compared with the other MICE cities, as there is more option for transportation. However, the traffic jams in Bangkok is the downside of the city.
(Events Planner, Bangkok)

I know the city has been promoted as a MICE city and as a city it is well known as a tourism destination, so everyone wants to visit for sure. However, it is not easy to access the city even if we have an international airport, as local transportation still needs to improve.
(Event planner, Phuket).

The airline is the leading service for both international and national attendees, but we still struggle with the local transportation system in many ways such as unstable costs, timing, and service.
(Event planner, Khon Kaen).

It is frustratingly to hear that local public transport is problematic in every MICE city. Each service provider sets their fare based on different criteria, leading to a lack of a standard fare or standard services, as some participants mentioned:

There is a lack of standard in term of fare and service; our clients complained as they found it different most of the time.
(Event planner, Phuket)

The classic issue that we found when our clients use a taxi is that some taxi drivers refuse to use a meter and insist on giving a fixed fare.
(Hotel, Pattaya)

When taking a taxi, the fare is more expensive for a foreigner, and they find it unfair. Especially, from the airport, there is no meter, and the driver just sets the rates.
(Event Planner, Phuket)

One last challenge about Thailand's public transportation is the poorly planned road network. Hanaoka (2007) confirmed that the roads in Thailand, especially in Bangkok, are insufficient for the city size and population. Big cities such as Bangkok, Chiang Mai and Pattaya have traffic problems, particularly during peak times. The participants mentioned that when the city holds enormous events or exhibitions, transport becomes an extremely big issue.

The traffic jams in Bangkok could be extremely mad, and very often the issue puts our clients off and changes their mind to go somewhere else.
(Event planner, Bangkok)

Very often the events have been canceled and moved from Bangkok to somewhere else because of the transportation conditions.
(Event planner, Bangkok)

Bangkok is the capital city where they have more options for the travellers, but the traffic congestion seems like a serious issue that needs to be solved for Bangkok as well as other MICE cities such as Chiang Mai and Pattaya.
(Hotel, Pattaya)

Phuket is an island, and at peak times and during the high season the road could be busy, and as we know, Phuket is an international area that is mixed with commuters from all over the world. Thus, are not only the roads overloaded but also road safety, and the rules are hard to control.
(Event planner, Phuket)

Venues with technological facilities are important. Regarding the BESTBET study, an assortment of suitable venues and accommodation in the MICE destination is fundamental to attracting the MICE market. The flexibility and capacity of the hotels affects the success of business events tourism destinations, for example in Glasgow. Venues with a purpose-built conference centre have been considered in order to increase business event tourism business, for example in Newcastle. Correspondingly, in Thailand it was found that a suitable venue with a high standard of technology was necessary in each city in order to increase MICE industry.

Every MICE city needs to have a venue that offers high standard facilities including technology, equipment, and staff with high-level skills. Otherwise, there is no point in promoting the city as a MICE city.
(Event planner, Chiang Mai)

The suitable/correct venue is very important within a MICE city; the MICE city should have the capacity to hold mega events together with excellent facilities and amenities.

(Government/Trade Associations, Bangkok)

The venue should be considered as a symbol of MICE city; for example, KICE could be a representative of Khon Kaen as one of the MICE cities in Thailand.

(Venue, Khon Kaen)

‘Technology’ in this context most of the time means facilities provided at the venue or in the meeting room itself. Deng, Kuo and Chen (2008) indicate that support facilities, which included computers and internet access, had an impact on customer satisfaction. Chiou (2012) found that facilities included conference rooms with professional video and audio facilities, and that this is one of the factors that supports the development of the MICE industry.

Unsurprisingly, infrastructure, which includes venues, transport and technology, is one of the most important factors in MICE industry. In fact, infrastructure is a major component necessary to sustain MICE organizational effectiveness. The local firms providing tourism, venues, transport and activities are major components in measuring the role of MICE tourism in the economy (Drian and Chaponnière, 2008). The findings show that very often meetings, conferences or even exhibitions happened in a hotel for convenience. For instance, Phuket does not have an exhibition venue but hotels in that role. Lockyer (2005) found accommodation and facilities to be influential factors in site selection. However, the study also found that venues require improvement in several ways, for instance standard services, the number of experienced staff in the venues, and safety and security (see section 6.5.6).

6.5.3 Networking

Networking was defined in the literature review as concerned with external organizations such as the International Congress and Convention (ICCA), the Meetings Industry Association (MIA), and CVBs. It was assumed that a connection with other players and a membership of these associations in the industry could enhance market intelligence. Chapter 2 notes that these associations provide a variety of information that can be shared among the membership. Lee and Back (2009) indicate that specific education and

networking in MICE could help to predict attendees' satisfaction. Event planners have benefited from these organizations as they provide a variety of information. Ramsborg (2008) suggests that meeting planners should leverage existing networking opportunities to solidify relationships among attendees and enhance the value attendees find in a sense of being connected to others.

Along with CVBs, the ICCA could help in promoting and presenting the products and services of destinations. Destinations can pass clients within networks and share information on their specific conference needs. CVBs organize familiarization trips for meeting planners interested in a destination. Given a CVB's intimate knowledge of the destination, it is in a position to advise planners on site selection, transportation, and local services. For a specific convention/meeting, it can provide referral services by suggesting reliable and appropriate service providers. This is important because this can gain the trust of clients and reduce the labour involved in event planning.

In Thailand, there are two key MICE organizations: the Thai Incentive Convention Association (TICA) and the Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB). Both organizations are non-profit organizations representing the Thai government (the roles and responsibilities of TICA and TCEB were given in Chapter 2). Participants were asked how they work and if and how the connections benefit them. For some participants, being a member of these organizations gained them tremendous benefits:

Our company is a member of TCEB and TICA and we are happy as we always get updated information from them.
(Event planner, Khon Kaen).

We always have new clients after we go to the roadshow with TCEB as we could gain a faithful reputation; this is because TCEB and TICA have supported us.
(Event planner, Phuket).

We have had support from TCEB and local authority in several ways such as information about the events, helping in the advertisement, and sometimes even new clients.
(Government/Trade Associations, Pattaya).

Being endorsed by TCEB and TICA benefits these event planners, but there is an entirely different impression from other event planners. Most of the small

companies with limited experience in the MICE industry tended to require support from TCEB and TICA.

As we are a local business, we still have to learn to deal with the MICE industry so if we could have more support from TCEB that would be great
(Hotel, Pattaya).

Some would argue that, being a member and sharing information with the others unnecessary. I had run my company for more than 15 years now even before MICE had emerged; it was good until the MICE city had [been] established. Our job is getting more difficult as it not only local competition but also bigger companies with more resources mainly from Bangkok. These companies have been introduced to clients by TCEB and TICA. Thus, I would not say being in touch with them helps me much with my business.
(Event planner, Khon Kaen).

We do not really use a network with other event planners, and we are more likely [to be] competitors rather than friends.
(Event planner, Phuket).

As [is] the nature of Thai people when talking about business, we are not sure if we can trust each other that much. This applies with the knowledge and experience in the business as well. I am not sure if we are willing to share everything.
(Government/Trade Associations, Chiang Mai).

The current study found networking to be extremely important regarding the qualitative results, as the interviews found that a majority of participants observed that networking is important for sharing information. Having a connection is considered beneficial for a business, especially if sharing resources. Yodsuwan (2009) indicates that networking and cooperation among the stakeholders supports the success of tourism destination management. In the context of the MICE sector, DMOs and CVBs have the most resources and information about the major industrialized elements such as transportation, local communication, visitors' attractions, bidding processes (Choi et al., 2007). This information is shared among the membership. On the other hand, a few participants were concerned that this aggravated competition, and that better strategies and information are necessary.

6.5.4 Bidding

For international events, a bidding process may be used, with the aim of attracting events (Westerbeek et al., 2006; Getz, 2004). In Chapter 4, the bidding process laid out in the BESTBET framework was a process of gathering market intelligence and presenting the products and services of the destination (Haven-Tang, 2008). Bidding has been abandoned as a topic in academic studies: there are very few studies focusing on the bidding process in the MICE industry, and most of these have been in the field of large sporting events (Kovacevic, 2014). For that reason, the current study attempted to investigate if the bidding process is an important factor from the practitioners' perspective in the MICE industry. There was limited knowledge and experience of the bidding process for stakeholders in the MICE industry. Most of the participants confessed that they have no experience with bidding. Getz (2008) noted that to win bids, a destination needs strong partners, excellent presentation skills, and a unique selling point.

As we are a local events planner, we do not have much chance of participating in any bidding; in fact, I am not sure if I know how to start and prepare the proposal for the bidding process.
(Event planner, Khon Kaen).

Even when the event takes place locally, most of the time, event planners are from Bangkok. As we do not have many local companies that plan events, this could be the reason why we do not know much about the bidding process.
(Government/Trade Associations, Pattaya).

I do not think bidding is useful as what I know is they have already set their mind which event planner will get the event, so it is useless!
(Event planner, Khon Kaen).

We do not really bother to prepare for the bidding as we know the event will happen in the chosen destination; the event planner is always from Bangkok.
(Event planners, Khon Kaen).

These comments reflect that big companies are paying a great deal of attention to the bidding process, especially for international events and exhibitions, and a winning bid could increase the economic viability of a host city (Gartrell, 1988; Jones & Webb, 2007). The study found that most of the participants with

knowledge of bidding are from large companies that have been operating for over a decade, and that work in collaboration with the TCEB or other DMOs.

Our company has a MICE department which focuses on the MICE industry in particular. The bidding process is a very important process in order to get the event.
(Event planner, Bangkok).

To win a mega exhibition or international events, we need to be well prepared with all the experience we have and the more experience you have, the more trust you get. However, we have the TCEB name as a supporter who helps the bidding process.
(Event planner, Bangkok).

Having TCEB as a backup helps a lot especially when we have to deal with a new market and new clients.
(Event planner, Bangkok).

We always get information from TCEB about the bidding and also the guideline with the list of criteria to prepare for each event. To work on the list, it is not really hard as most of the time an international event happens in Bangkok, and as a capital city, the benefit is the completed list of all the good facilities and transportation.
(Event planner, Bangkok).

We are lucky as the city is already well known and we have high standard facilities and services plus we have TCEB as a sponsor. Thus the bidding is not a hard job to prepare at all.
(Event Planner, Phuket)

Clearly, the TCEB has been playing a central role in marketing geographic areas to meeting and convention planners, the travel trade, individuals and other groups. Buathong and Lai (2019) indicated that most of the key strategies, include winning more bids for Thailand to host events, are created by the TCEB. Many participants observed that TCEB provides advice on how to influence the destination selection process and proactively identify target markets to suit the events with the destination. Getz, Anderson and Sheehan (1998) indicate that CVBs are facilitators and producers of products and services related to an event. However, a destination can always improve the quality of its services, balancing resources to compete for different types and size of events (Getz, 2004). However, there is still not a clear picture of the bidding process in the MICE industry in Thailand. Some participants understood and were excited about bidding, while others felt this was an unnecessary process, particularly for the

smallest companies. Therefore, bidding will be retained for further investigation in the quantitative data collection.

6.5.5 Ambassadors/Symbols

Ambassadors have been found to be a critical success factor in the BESTBET study. Ambassadors are people or organizations who take responsibility to secure business event tourism (BET) business for a destination, by promoting it, especially in a bidding process (Haven-Tang, 2008). Chapter 2 presented the importance and influence of ambassadors for MICE destinations. In many countries, an effective ambassador programme has been provided by DMOs (Getz, 2004). Training programmes help to clarify the role and techniques for dealing with other areas of the industry (Davidson and Rogers, 2006). The current study found the participants have a variety of understandings of the concept of an ambassador, as apparent in the comments below:

Not sure if we have one really, but as our city is well known, it could be a good representative of Phuket as a MICE city maybe?
(Travel agency, Phuket).

Local people could be ambassadors; I am not so sure if they realize that their city is a MICE city. If they get to know this, then I think the role of the residents could be considered to be a good ambassador.
(Event planner, Bangkok)

Local people could be an ambassador for the MICE city. For the last few years, TCEB has provided many related courses in our MICE city for key stakeholders as well as the interested locals. Therefore, to remind us how MICE is essential to the city I think we all can be an ambassador for our city.
(Event planner, Chiang Mai)

The comments indicate that there are different ideas about ambassadors of MICE cities. Some consider the city itself could be a good ambassador as well as the people who are already based in the MICE city. Some agreed that the ambassador could be a representative of the city, such as a name or symbol.

Not sure if our venue could be considered as an ambassador of the city as the name of the venue is very similar to the city's name. For example, the name of the venue is KICE which relates to (Khon Kaen +MICE), so this could be a representative of Khon Kaen as a MICE city. Well, I guess anyway.

(Venue, Khon Kaen)

We are lucky as our leader has a vision and sees how many benefits that we will have by being a MICE city, so he created a Khon Kaen province brand call “Dino Brand.” The Dino Brand is considered as an ambassador of Khon Kaen.

(Government/Trade Association, Khon Kaen)

This final comment links together the role of a MICE city ambassador and leadership in the city, as does the comment below:

I think TCEB could be an ambassador of the MICE cities as TCEB is already the leader of the MICE industry in Thailand.

(Hotel, Pattaya)

The Congress Convention Association (2013) defined an ambassador within the MICE industry as ‘a person of knowledge and stature, influential in their field, which can act as a representative of a destination and is prepared to work with local meeting professionals to secure convention business for that destination.’ However, an ambassador could be in a different form. For instance, in the UK this term is used to describe those who promote destinations within a bidding process (Haven-Tang et al., 2007). Likewise, an ambassador in Saudi Arabia refers to a person who is well-trained and has knowledge of the country related to international conventions and exhibitions (Alagos, 2014). Ambassadors can undertake marketing activities in tourism businesses via cooperative arrangements and share information to support each other’s activities and compete with other destinations (Wang and Krakover, 2008). This study found that the TCEB, various symbols of the MICE cities and certain groups of people were all considered ambassadors by some research participants. However, to understand the importance of the ambassador factor from the key stakeholders’ perspective is challenging. Therefore, this will be further investigated using a quantitative approach.

6.5.6 Skills

Human resources play a significant role in the tourism and hospitality industry because they add value and raise the quality of products and services. The BESTBET study confirmed that the skills of people who work at business events are essential. The BESTBET study indicated that to deliver an appropriate

service, the worker needs to understand the nature of the business of MICE travellers. Professional knowledge that allows staff to answer visitors' questions was critical for improving customer satisfaction at international conferences in Taiwan (Kuo, Chen and Lin, 2010). Moreover, the BESTBET study identifies some specific skills that might be needed in business tourism, such as working in the bidding process, marketing, safety and security. Likewise, in a Thai context it was found that many participants mentioned that working in the MICE industry could be shared with the tourism and hospitality industry.

Many studies have suggested that the helpfulness and friendliness of the staff and locals in an area is a critical attribute when attempting to satisfy visitors (Kozak, 2002b). According to conventional wisdom, the skill of workers in a MICE city is a key success factor that needs to be investigated.

Most of the workers currently in the MICE section have already had experience within the tourism and hospitality sectors. However, specific skills for the MICE section are still needed, such as preparing for the bidding process.

(Travel agency, Pattaya)

We used to assume that people who have been working in the tourism industry could efficiently work in the MICE industry, but I have realized there are some particular skills that we require for the MICE workers, especially in an exhibition.

(Event planner, Phuket)

As I know, MICE is a new thing for us, and not many university or colleges have MICE subjects yet. This is the reason why we still lack workers with experience.

(Event planner, Phuket)

I am glad that from now on many universities will start teaching MICE meaning we will eventually have more people who have a familiar background, which will [make it] easy [for them] to learn and gain some experience.

(Event planners Khon Kaen)

Admittedly, some jobs require some specific skills; for example, the exhibition section will need people who have experience such as bidding.

(Professional exhibition organizer, Bangkok).

These interviews highlight some issues similar to those raised by the BESTBET study, as the participants observed a lack of workers with specific skills in areas

such as bidding, marketing and leadership. As the participants mentioned, the majority of workers in the MICE city now are employed in the tourism and hospitality industry. Therefore, the lack of experienced workers was considered an essential issue from the practitioners' perspective.

Since the people who work in MICE have mainly been working in a travel agency or a hotel, which in turn can be a bit different from MICE, means that a number of workers in the MICE industry have minimal experience.

(Event planner, Khon Kaen)

As we know, MICE is pretty new for Thailand and Thai people. That's why we do not have many people who specialize in the MICE area. However, I am glad that many institutions have started teaching MICE and related subjects.

(Travel agency, Chiang Mai)

It is not easy at all to find the staff to work in a particular field (MICE), so we decided to train staff by taking on trainee students from universities who study the MICE subject, and then we give them a job after the training period.

(Event planner, Phuket)

The interviews signposted that the number of workers who have knowledge and experience in the MICE industry from the practitioners' perspective is limited. Consequently, communication and workflow between the stakeholders and guests could also be an issue. The BESTBET study points out how important communication is in creating the first and last impressions of a city for visitors. Likewise, Kuo, Chen and Lin (2010) state that to provide adequate services, workers require professional knowledge to answer guests' questions, as well as responding well to all possible incidents and accidents in Taiwan. Communicating with guests in different languages (especially English) is considered a critical element, particularly if a company hopes to access the international market.

English language could be an issue especially if the company is dealing with international clients. Our company provides an English course "English for communication" for our staff. However, in the future, we expected to recruit someone who knows more than one language.

(Event planner, Bangkok)

Knowing more than one language is now important as these days we have to contact people all over the world. I think English is important

and has become a universal language now, but other languages are also necessary too, for example, Chinese or Russian.
(Event planner, Phuket)

Findings from the interviews concerning the current study have been added to previous studies in the MICE industry. Workers in the MICE industry in the Asia Pacific region need to improve their skills and experience, ideally acquiring additional language to enhance customer satisfaction (Kuo et al., 2010; MacLaurin, 2002). Some participants indicated that organizational and management skills, including event-specific technical and administrative skills or workflow, are key to hosting in MICE cities and need to be improved:

[An] ability to communicate the workflow of staff in the company is also important because MICE travellers are people who travel for business and work, which require better service than just leisure travellers do. To provide a professional service is the aim of our company.
(Event planner, Bangkok)

A high standard of service among the workers in the MICE industry includes communication and the ability to run a work process. This could help to gain some benefits and give a good picture of Thai workers in the MICE industry.
(Event planner, Bangkok)

Training courses in subjects such as marketing, management, communication, leadership and the English language might be a solution to some of these issues.

I try to attend the training courses that TCEB provided which relate to MICE as much as I can, such as the marketing program. This is really helpful as I do not have to go back to school, but I can still improve on the skills that I need.
(Travel agency, Pattaya)

I am glad now some Universities in Thailand started to add a MICE subject, as I believe that learning from school first then the training afterward would be comprehensive for the young generation.
(Event planner, Bangkok).

We have many excellent students from local colleges and universities who are teaching meeting and event operations and MICE management subjects. Therefore, the students are almost ready to work in the industry when they finish.
(Event planner, Phuket)

At first glance, it may appear that some participants agreed that Thai universities should teach students about MICE industry, while others argue that practical skills and experience is much more important than theoretical, and that working in the industry is the only way to learn.

I do not think Thai universities need to teach a particular subject in MICE, but maybe it could be just an option or short training course. As I think, they need to learn from their real working life as it is much different from reading books. My staff here have never qualified for a MICE degree, but they work very well just from the hospitality knowledge and time being.
(Venue, Khon Kaen)

If you have enough resources and lecturers who could teach MICE or have a degree, it would be OK. However, I would say the best way to learn is to work in the industry. So maybe instead of investing the money in education, I think better to invest in the industry, such as infrastructure for instance.
(Event planner, Phuket)

The findings from the interview indicate that the skill or quality of staff is a critical success factor. Swarbrooke and Horner (2001) identify the quality of staff as of fundamental importance to success in the tourism industry. For the MICE industry in Thailand, participants observed some issues, including a scarcity of skilled workers. Despite the fact that the MICE industry has been growing constantly in global terms, the number of workers with substantial experience in the industry is still limited (Fenich and Hashimoto, 2010; Uansard and Binprathan, 2018). Furthermore, specific skills such as languages and communication skills need to be improved. Kuo, Chen and Lin (2010) found that a good command of languages, the right attitude and friendly service are the most critical elements in customer satisfaction for international conferences. To enhance these skills, educational and training are necessary. To developed the MICE industry in South Wales, event-specific technical and administrative skills were considered essential to support the organizational and management skills of the workers in the MICE industry (Webb and Haven-Tang, 2006).

6.5.7 Branding

The BESTBET study found that the branding of a destination is critical in developing a business and event tourism destination. A reputation for hosting

successful events and a desirable image are important selection criteria for those planning meetings and exhibitions (DiPietro et al., 2008). Perceptions of the success or failure of a MICE location are based on images held by potential visitors and how these images are managed (Sönmez & Sirakaya, 2002). Therefore, to develop and manage a destination's branding, understanding and care is required. Likewise, branding a destination as part of a sensitive transformation requires planners to represent realistically the functional, empirical and symbolic nature of the destination and the various characteristics that need to be identified and emphasised (Aaker, 2004; Hakala, Laetti and Sandberg, 2011).

The study confirmed that a brand should underpinned by a clear approach and collective aspiration, linked to a coherent BET strategy, as found in South Wales. The characteristics and understanding of the sense of place and recognizing the motivations of tourists need to be clarified (Adriana et al., 2013). Adriana et al. (2013) further describe that the explicit framework of the destination provides the destination managers with an opportunity to develop an appropriate brand strategy that is representative of its people and cognizant of their place. Conversely, capital city status provides enormous opportunities and confidence to draw attention to the destination (Webb & Haven-Tang, 2006). Correspondingly, this current study found that the branding of a destination is a critical factor for key stakeholders from the MICE industry standpoint.

As Bangkok is the capital city of Thailand, it could provide an excellent source of branding within the MICE city and therefore probably be the best MICE city of Thailand.
(Event planner, Bangkok)

The name of Bangkok is well known as the capital city of Thailand. Therefore to branding the city as a MICE should be very clear.
(Travel agency, Bangkok)

Bangkok has more opportunity as the city is in the centre of the country and everything is there. Thus, every kind of events could happen in Bangkok with not much effort needed.
(Event planner, Bangkok).

I believe that TCEB selected to promote the five MICE cities (Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Khon Kaen, Pattaya, and Phuket) because the cities are within the central city of each region of Thailand. The destination

branding will be easier for example; Phuket, Chiang Mai, and Pattaya are well known as tourist destinations.
(Travel agency, Chiang Mai)

I think that the MICE cities have been selected as a MICE city because [each one] is the central city of each region and this helps the brand image of the city [to be seen] as trustworthy and guarantees that the cities have the capability to hold events.
(Event planner, Khon Kaen)

However, some participants argue that before promoting a city, gaining an awareness of the city's residents should be a concern. Basic knowledge of the MICE industry and MICE cities should be delivered to local people. Consequently, everyone can act as a representative of the city, working towards the same ambitions.

I am not sure if the locals know that the city has been called a MICE city of Thailand as they are used to seeing tourists around anyway.
(Event planner, Phuket)

To be seen as a MICE city everyone in the city should be aware that we are a MICE city so the MICE traveller should know at least where to go for the exhibition in case we are asked.
(Event planner, Chiang Mai)

The local service providers such as taxi drivers, shops, and restaurants should be aware of what MICE is and know that they are in a MICE city. However, I think we all did an excellent job, as I am sure our people know that the city is busy when we have an event on.
(Event planner, Khon Kaen)

The interviews above demonstrate that the branding of a city is essential: a clear picture has to be presented. The status of the city as a national or regional capital may increase the confidence of visitors. However, there is some mixed thinking here, as a few participants point out that the city is well known because of tourism resources that may have less relevance to MICE travellers, such as beaches, natural beauty, cultural activities and so forth.

The city has already been well-known long before the MICE industry and TCEB appeared, due to the excellent beaches and sea resorts. Subsequently, the brand of the city or the name of the city does not need to be promoted.
(Travel agency, Phuket)

Being promoted as a MICE city is a good thing as the city has always been recognized as [a good place to go for] nightlife tourism for tourists all over the world. However, the brand position of the city might need updating sometimes.

(Hotel, Pattaya)

Interestingly, some participants reflected a confusion between MICE tourists and more general tourists. A MICE city in the Thai context, from the key participants' perspective, should be a well-known city and an established tourist attraction. A few participants observed a lack of an awareness of promoting MICE cities or that their city is considered a MICE city. Clearer policy and knowledge for residents as well as local service providers and even local government is urgently required. Henderson (2006) identifies that activities of destination branding create an awareness of the destination through the brand's imagery, such as a brand slogan, which reflected the essence of the destination. Therefore, to attract more MICE travellers, the brand of a MICE city needs to be focused, creating an image that influences visitors to visit the destination (Blain et al., 2005).

6.6 Additional Factors

All seven factors from the framework have been found to be critical success factors in MICE city development in the Thai context. However, the study revealed some additional factors that are also considered important, as below.

6.6.1 Tourist Attractions

As discussed above, participants agreed that a MICE city should provide visitors with more than just a business trip. Participants were asked if they think it necessary for a MICE city to have leisure activities and tourist attractions. There were two different views here. The majority of participants indicated that having access to activities after a meeting or conference is important, even though the aim of the trip for the business traveller is for work. The perceived image of a destination as an attractive convention location plays a significant role in the process of site selection for events and exhibition planners (McCartney, 2008). The current study found several different tourist attractions that have been considered by key stakeholders in a Thai context.

Guests are always excited about where they can visit after the meeting as they know that Phuket has great beaches to visit. Therefore, we always recommend activities or places to visit after the meeting in the meeting program.

(Event planners, Phuket)

One of the attractiveness's of Pattaya is that the city has many options for activities for visitors such as the beach, nightlife, and events. These could provide more experiences for the MICE group more than just a meeting. Therefore, I think attractions are important for MICE cities.

(Hotel, Pattaya)

Chiang Mai is the city centre of the Lanna kingdom, and the Lanna culture played an important role in developing the upper part of northern Thailand. The Lanna culture could include art, food, clothes, architecture, ceremony and the way people live in the area. These attract people from all over the world, including the MICE group.

(Spar Manager, Chiang Mai)

Khon Kaen is not [likely to be a place] that visitors [have visited before] and everywhere is far away. However, we try to create more activities and attractions for them pre-and post- tours. Moreover, the attractions of Khon Kaen are active in agriculture, education and medical.

(Events planner, Khon Kaen)

These participants perceived that it as essential for MICE cities to have attractions for visitors. Phuket and Pattaya named their beautiful beaches, while cultural heritage might be more relevant for a city such as Chiang Mai.

Some would argue that the MICE visitor is a person who travels for work and has only limited time, and therefore they might only need basic facilities and services, rather than more traditional tourist activities, which could be seen as distractions:

I do not think the business traveller will care to check if the city has things or places that they can visit because some people only come here for one night, so their time is very limited. Perhaps the event planners better make sure that the facilities and basic needs are working correctly.

(Event planner, Bangkok)

I would not say that the MICE city needs to have any attractions as most attending the meeting or conference has a clear aim of their trip. Some people travel for more than 20 hours and only stay for 2-3 days, so they do not really ask for entertainment.

(Event planner, Bangkok)

On the other hand, a few participants disagreed, finding it unnecessary for MICE cities to have tourist attractions, as the aim of a trip for the MICE traveller is complex. DiPietro et al. (2008) found that focusing destinations and CVBs on promoting and developing areas such as support services, high-quality hotels, and meeting spaces will be more beneficial than focusing on entertainment venues. Consequently, it is challenging to see how tourist attractions influence the success of MICE destinations and whether this factor should be considered in the benchmarking, particular as this factor is not part of the BESTBET framework. This factor will be explored more in Chapter 7.

6.6.2 Reputation of the city

Some participants comment that in order to be successful in promoting a city as a MICE city, the city should be well known. Foodness and Murray (1999) claimed that information that stimulates awareness or interest may be decisive. The study found that some MICE cities were already well-known and this could be the beneficial for developing the city as a MICE a city.

Some MICE city does not have to be promote at all for example Phuket is already popular city and people know and want to visit the city. And this is a benefit for Phuket to not have to put an effort promoting themselves as a MICE city that much.
(Event Planners, Khon Kaen)

Many people already know Chiang Mai as a favourite tourism destination of Thailand. So, to promote the city to attracted MICE traveller should not be difficult.
(Event Planner, Chiang Mai)

The reputation of the city could affect destination branding. Accruing to the comments above some participants agreed that to promote and develop a destination, destination branding should be taken into an account.

6.6.3 Annual events

A ‘tourist attraction’ in the current study context also refers to places or events and activities within the destination. Chacko and Fenich (2000) indicated that the promotional appeal of a site is a fundamental contributor of an overall convention destination attractiveness. The study found that the majority of participants agreed that to ensure that the city is a desirable place to visit, the city should provide more than just a venue or infrastructure (DiPietro et al., 2008). Therefore, a number of participants were confident that promoting their own city as a MICE city should not be difficult, as Thailand is well known as a tourism destination, and that tourist attractions could make a city more interesting for a MICE traveller. Furthermore, some participants observed that an event could be considered as one of the tourist attractions.

As Khon Kaen has not much places that MICE traveller could visit compare with the other MICE city such as Phuket and Pattaya. However, very often that the city could attract more traveller to visit the city with an event we have such as Khon Kaen Silk Festival which it held in the city for 10 days at the end of November and Beginning of December each year. And this time of the year Khon Kaen always busier comparing with the other time of the year.
(Event Planner, Khon Kaen)

Water Festival is one of the most popular festival that could attract tourism including the MICE group to visit Chiang Mai every year. So, I would say having an event in the city is probably can be a good thing for a MICE city.
(Event Planners, Chiang Mai)

From these two reflections, it could be assumed that an annual event or an activity in the city could be one of the factors that a MICE city could consider as a key success factor in developing. This view is supported by DiPietro et al. (2008) who found that one of the most important site selection criteria for a MICE city is its image as a desirable place to visit. Consequently, it is challenging to investigate how tourist attractions influence the success of MICE destinations and whether this factor should be considered in the benchmarking, particular as this factor is not part of the BESTBET framework. This factor will be explored more in Chapter 7.

6.6.4 Risk Prevention

Risk prevention is another factor that emerged from the current study, which is missing from the BESTBET study. In the context of the study, the concept of risk prevention refers to predicting perceptions of risk in order to assess and manage it. Many studies that consider conference planners' views found this to be the most important factor (Oppermann, 1996; Hinkin and Tracey, 2003; Linsley et al., 2008). The participants describe risk as anything that could cause harm. Event planners must take necessary precautions to ensure the health, safety, and welfare of their clients and staff. These procedures need to be precisely evaluated and the appropriate protective and preventive measures put in place.

A majority of our clients are international, and they always ask about the risk prevention plans and risk management system.
(Event planners, Phuket)

Security is one of the most important things that need to be considered, and we need to be very clear [about it] in order to win the bidding process, especially when you plan to hold a large exhibition or conference.
(Event planner, Bangkok)

Risk prevention was not mentioned by many participants in the current study and risk prevention perception has not been specifically researched. MICE tourism, like tourism considered more broadly, contains elements of risk, such as large crowds, the size and nature of event sites, time of day, nature of event, consumables, age of crowd, weather conditions, and location (Tarlow, 2002). Previous studies have confirmed that risk is essential in developing the MICE industry and the interviewees agree that a security system is vital in the process of bidding for a destination (Robson, 2009). McLaurin and Wykes (2003) identify numerous checklists that assist in determining the potential risks that could affect the success of a project. Many of the educational programs offered for event planners now contain courses on risk (e.g. Ryerson, 2008). This is both an ethical obligation and a legal concern, protecting the attendee, the client, and the event professional. Consequently, risk prevention was investigated as part of the quantitative study (see Chapter 8).

6.6.5 Risk Management

The issue of how to manage harm after it has happened was mentioned by a few participants who had experienced incidents related to food safety or on-site security. They felt that both prevention and managing the harm after the event were important:

I remember our company almost went out of business when the tsunami happened in 2004. Almost every client cancelled and moved to other countries, and it happened again when we had a political issue. I could not blame the clients if they are worried about risk and security. However, we managed to improve and showed them that they would be safe by providing risk prevention and risk management plans.
(Event planners, Phuket)

The ways that we handle the situation is also important in order to gain the credit from our clients. As some people tended to understand that the natural calamity is hard to control, but to present the ways that we recover after it happened is important. It took us a few years to gain back credibility and get back again to the MICE market after the tsunami.
(Event planner, Phuket)

The risk management strategy also related with the experience of the event planner. Our company has been operating in MICE for more than 10 years and has many regular clients who been with us since we started the business. This could guarantee that we have had a good way to handle the risk or damage that might occur before, during and after the event. However, the risk could be in different forms such as flight or transport delay or cancelation, injuries and health issues. We need to ensure that we know how to solve the problems and this will come with experience.
(Even planner, Phuket)

Participants observed that time and proven methods of handling risk helped to regain trust. Many studies suggest that the easier it is after the damage to recall or imagine what has happened, the more effect it has on risk perceptions (Cole and Withey, 1981; Robson, 2009; Goldblatt, 2008; Rutherford Silvers, 2008). Scholars indicate that risk management has their own process but an overall risk management process designs, coordinates, plans, and evaluates an event.

6.6.6 One-stop service

In the context of this study, a one-stop service centre refers to a non-profit association offering services and products within a MICE city. The participants agreed that each MICE city should have CVBs or a TCEB office, as they believe that it could be helpful for service providers (particularly event planners) and customers. Alexander et al. (2012) indicate that the buying process in the MICE sector tends to be more formal and professional than that of other consumers. As a critical player in the purchasing and decision-making process, event planners have the power to not only seek out possible meeting and event venues, but also to prevent sellers or information from reaching members of the decision-making group to reduce the complexity of contacting all the relevant organizations. Some participants liked the idea of having one stop service in a MICE city:

A one-stop service is a very good idea, and it is convenient since the guests only need to contact one person and get all the information about service providers as well as the information about activities or attractions in the city. I think it would be great if we could have one-stop services or a TCEB office in each MICE city, as we want to be clear on who and where to contact.

(Government/Trade Associations, Pattaya)

Yes, the idea of having a TCEB office seems reasonable as we have not been clear on where the information is held within our MICE city.

(Event planner, Khon Kaen)

On the other hand, having a one-stop service centre that is not run by a CVB or the TCEB might limit the data. Useful information is needed in decisions about resource allocation from both the public sector and private sector stakeholders, who greatly depend on accurate information (Dwyer and Kim, 2003). One participant observed that a one-stop service centre should have appropriate methods of research and updating the data held on each business. Pearlman (2008) indicates that otherwise decisions could be based on incomplete data.

A one-stop service centre sounds handy, but the main consideration is if they have enough correct information on every single service provider. Otherwise, it will be more difficult for a small business as they will have less chance to be [included] in the selection process. For example, I did not benefit from the one-stop service centre as my company always is changing and developing new products and services, which sometimes

means we have not reported it to the centre. However, if the centre takes it seriously and starts to estimate and collect comprehensive data without any preference or bias maybe they could really help to improve MICE in our city.

(Event planner, Khon Kaen)

Clearly the one-stop service centre needs to be more prominent, as only a few participants mentioned it. The participants state that the one-stop service centre is less complicated compared with consumer purchases, an organizational purchase, such as meeting and conventions, usually involves more decision-makers (i.e., the buying centre) (Bowen and Makens, 2009). Additionally, research in the tourism industry, especially in MICE activities, differs from research undertaken related to products but still involves a process of researching (i.e. seeking information) and the method of researching (i.e. channel choice) (Alexander et al., 2012). Therefore, a channel must be able to convey desirable information about a particular destination or venue that is appealing to event planners, which encourages them to conduct further investigation and promote the site to key decision-makers. There was debate as to whether a one-stop service is helpful, as bias and updating information issues need to be clarified. Therefore, the one-stop service factor was added to the questionnaire (see Chapter 7).

6.7 Missing factors that were expected to be found

Interestingly, the interview findings seem to focus only on competitiveness rather than concern for other issues that, given recent global societal developments, may have otherwise been expected to be mentioned. Section 2.7 discussed some issues of MICE destinations in developing countries and it is against this backdrop that the issues below are presented and discussed. According to literature reviews, some factors that could help improve the performance of the MICE industry are discussed below.

6.7.1 Corporate social responsibility (CSR)

As Chapter 1 indicated, the number of MICE travellers has been continually growing, which contributes positive economic impacts to the host country. On the other hand, there are also negative impacts, such as an increased carbon

footprint, pollution from air and car transportation, shortages in water supply, solid waste littering and the release of sewage (UNEP, 1999). In response to these crises, many corporations have employed corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities (Falck and Heblich, 2007; Golja and Nizic, 2010; Ryan, 2002). Such companies found CSR activities to be a factor that impacts MICE travellers' satisfaction, destination attachment and destination loyalty (Chubchuwong, 2019). The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD, 1999, p.897) defined CSR as 'the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as the local community and society at large.' There are several ways that companies respond to the CSR concept and consumers' perceived business ethics (CPE). Some companies make an effort to compensate for the negative environmental impact of their business trips by incorporating socially responsible activities into their overseas trips. Several companies operate in a way that considers the well-being of the overseas community. Many companies were found to include CSR activities when they travel to less developed destinations (Global Business Travel Association, 2017; Ryan, 2002). CSR activities have been found to be critical in tourism in relation to destination development, especially in developing countries. Several studies discussed responsible management by stakeholders. Many authors proposed that stakeholders should pay more attention to the negative environment impacts of tourism, as they play an important intermediary role for those who provide information to tourists about responsible tourism (e.g. Budeanu, 2005; Miller, 2001; Chubchuwong, 2019).

Sheldon and Park (2011) found that the majority of members of the US travel industry understand the importance of CSR and willing to engage in some CSR, while some are dedicated to CSR activities. The authors point out a need for clear conceptualization and directions for CSR engagement by the travel industry. On the demand side, attention on social and environmental impacts have been increased from many individuals, particularly those in developed countries, as they seek authentic tourism experiences (Dwyer et al., 2009). The study also indicated that destinations and stakeholders need to adapt to the needs

of travellers. Hence, the stakeholders need to be ‘experience’ providers who are innovative in developing new and satisfying tourism products.

In Thailand, CSR has been ignored compared to other countries according to the interview findings. The reason for this might be because the priority of the business sector is to be commercially viable. Nevertheless, the TCEB, as a leader in the MICE industry of Thailand, formulated and implemented the Green Meetings Guidelines: Advancing the Future of MICE in 2008. With a determined effort to set its event industry on an eco-friendly path, Thailand adopted a blueprint, which it has used to spread its message for developing event sustainability throughout Asia. In an effort to upgrade the sustainability of Thailand's MICE industry since 2012, the TCEB has promoted a new sustainability strategy for the Thai MICE industry, including the framework of a five-year scheme focused on activities to create awareness among organizations (TCEB, 2015a). Organizing MICE sustainability involves distributing international knowledge to MICE operators and interested parties (Rittichainuwat and Mair, 2012). The aim of this is to win more bids for Thailand to host events, promoting Thailand as a MICE destination, and developing MICE industry standards (TCEB, 2018). In some ways, it is surprising then, against this backdrop of government initiatives, that industry stakeholders do not mention CSR or sustainability as key factors in destination competitiveness. On the other hand, until a stronger demand-led “grass-roots” movement is established for CSR and sustainability, the main goal of business is likely to remain one of financial viability.

The idea of CSR activities has been supported by some studies. For example, Chubchuwong (2019) studied the characteristics of CSR activities conducted by international business groups, finding that stakeholders, as well as travellers, were aware of the impacts and willing to engage in CSR activities. However, the author also points out that the issues are of more concern to people from developed countries, perhaps because of increased awareness and understanding. The statement is supported by Tosun (1999), who states that people from developing countries have a capacity limitation, as well as apathy and low levels of awareness in the local community. However, the number of CSR activities campaigns increased in developing countries. In Thailand, TCEB

now encourages stakeholders to pay more attention to the environment and society (Chubchuwong, 2019).

In light of the rapid growth of the MICE sector and the potential for increased economic, environmental and social consequences resulting from this growth, it is crucial for stakeholders to have feasible strategies to deal with negative impacts, such as sustainable management, responsive processes, and social programs. Surprisingly, CSR was not mentioned in the interview findings of the study. According to Section 2.6, environmental issues are of less concern to those from developing countries, because the business sectors are more focused on profit in order to enhance competition. However, TCEB is now convincing stakeholders to pay more attention on the negative impacts from MICE industry. CSR may be helpful in managing negative impacts while strengthening the benefits that business events can bring to communities. Furthermore, CSR could be a factor that supports a destination to attract more MICE travellers, especially people concerned about sustainability. Therefore, stakeholders should be aware of CSR in developing MICE destinations.

6.7.2 Smart destinations

Another missing factor that was been expected (but which is missing from the interviews) is smart destinations. The concept of smart destinations has been mentioned in destination development in Thailand, but it was not mentioned by the interviewees (perhaps because the smart destination notion can be confused with that of MICE destinations).

Several studies attempted to define smart destinations. However, the concept of a smart city is different and there is still not a clear and consistent understanding of the concept among practitioners and academics (Chourabi et al., 2012). Some studies described the smart city as digital or intelligent and some are recognizing the use of the smart city as an urban labeling phenomenon (Holland, 2008). Likewise, a smart city is defined as a city that is connected to leverage the collective intelligence of the city in several ways, such as physical infrastructure, IT infrastructure, social infrastructure, and business infrastructure (Harrison et al., 2010). However, the definition of a smart city is unclear. According to the literature, it could be assumed that a smart city is based

on the concept of trying to make a city smarter (Chourabi et al., 2012). The smart city concept has become popular in Southeast Asia in recent years. Singapore, for example, proposed a smart city network to enhance connectivity between the urban centre (Niculescu and Wadhwa, 2015).

Likewise, today the smart city has become a nationwide policy in the Thai context. Several projects have been created to support the smart city policy that aims to make a whole city smarter. The Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (MICT) created a strategy to develop more environmentally friendly, habitable cities in The Twelfth National Economic and Social Development Plan (Office of National Economic and Social Development Board, 2017). The smart city project also focuses on specific cities to increase knowledge about digital technology. In doing so, the Phuket Smart Innovation Park centre has been established to distribute knowledge and promote the application of digital technology in business (Khianmeesuk, 2017). Not to be outdone by Phuket Province, a local authority of Chiang Mai wanted to create a smart city in Chiang Mai Province. The city created the Digital Economy Promotion Agency (DEPA) with three operational plans: tackling smoke and haze problems, institutionalizing smart agriculture, and the application of technology to solve transport problems and support the tourism industry in the province. However, in the process of achieving the smart city goal, Chiang Mai found the same challenges as Phuket of how to effectively implement the policy, i.e. no clear policy statement, lack of knowledge, and understanding on the part of the staff of government agencies, and insufficient allocated budget (Napathansuk, 2017). Khon Kaen has also attempted to improve infrastructure within the city, through measures such as investment in an international venue and established a light rail project in 2017. These projects are still ongoing (Napathansuk, 2017).

Unsurprisingly, the smart city has been found as a critical success factor in improving MICE cities. By looking at the policy of smart cities in Thailand, we can see that it is very new and understanding is lacking, as is clear and coherent policy.

6.8. Conclusion

Table 6.2 Factors derived from qualitative data collection

| Scale Item | BESTBET & Literature | Thailand |
|---|----------------------|----------|
| Leadership | | |
| 1. Policies and subvention (financial or in-kind support from destination) | √ | √ |
| 2. (Presentation) Promoting a good image of the city as a great MICE city | √ | √ |
| Infrastructure | | |
| 3. Transportation | √ | √ |
| 4. Quality of venue facilities | √ | √ |
| 5. High standard of technology | √ | √ |
| Networking | | |
| 6. Networking/communication | √ | √ |
| Bidding | | |
| 7. The bidding process is reliable | √ | √ |
| 8. Supportive local relevant agencies in the city in the process of bidding | √ | |
| Ambassador | | |
| 9. Symbol | √ | √ |
| Skills | | |
| 10. Experience and knowledge of workers in the MICE industry | √ | √ |
| 11. The availability and sufficiency of workers in the MICE industry. | √ | √ |
| 12. Foreign languages | √ | √ |
| 13. Ability to communicate the workflow of the workers in the MICE industry | √ | √ |
| 14. Training course | √ | √ |
| Branding | | |
| 15. An awareness of what a MICE city is among local people | √ | √ |
| Addition factors | √ | √ |
| 16. Tourist attractions within the MICE city | | √ |
| 17. Reputation of the city | | √ |
| 18. Annual events | | √ |
| 19. Risk prevention | | √ |
| 20. Risk management | | √ |
| 21. One-stop service | | √ |

A qualitative study was conducted with key stakeholders in the MICE industry in Thailand, using questions derived from the BESTBET framework and the review of literature. The interviews aimed at assessing the crucial success factors named in the BESTBET framework, as well as seeking out new ones. The researcher attempted to identify whether the BESTBET framework is relevant and useful to destination benchmarking for MICE destinations in the Thai context. It was found that there are some factors from the BESTBET framework that affect developing MICE cities in Thailand, as well as some additional factors. Table 6.2 shows all the factors. The results from the interviews were used to develop the questionnaire and investigate further. When developing MICE in the Thai context, this study suggests some additional components should be added to the BESTBET framework, such as tourist attractions, reputation of the MICE city, annual events, security and risk prevention and management, and one-stop services. As mentioned, these qualitative results were used to develop a survey in the next stage and to expand upon the findings from the quantitative study and explore the performance of each MICE city in Thailand as well as investigate best practice of MICE cities in a Thai context.

Chapter 7. The Quantitative Study Results

7.1 Introduction

As discussed in previous chapters, the broad aims of the current research were to identify factors associated with a benchmarking tool to develop MICE cities in Thailand. The 21 factors from the interview results described in Chapter 6 are investigated further in this quantitative phase to confirm if these factors are essential for developing the MICE industry in the context of Thailand, and to identify how these factors are influencing the development of regional MICE destinations in Thailand. This chapter reports explicitly on the quantitative analysis, which was used to confirm existing factors in the MICE destination benchmarking frameworks (Webb and Haven-Tang, 2006) and to test for the significance of additional factors identified in the first phase of this study.

This first section of the chapter beginning with simpler analyses such as data entry, representativeness and descriptive statistics of an overview of the distribution methods, response rates, and respondents' profiles. Secondly, data screening was conducted to test data normality, missing data and outliers, as well as the validity and reliability of individual attributes. Checking the reliability of a scale involved examining Cronbach's alpha (see Section 7.4). Then, before conducting the Importance Performance Analysis (IPA), Lai and Lam (2010) suggest that the paired-samples t-test should be performed to confirm the gaps between performance and importance of the existing attributes, the paired-samples t-test was conducted to measure these gaps. Chen (2014) indicated that it is imperative to conduct an individual paired-samples t-test before performing the IPA. The author also suggests that only the attributes that show a significant difference ($p\text{-value} < 0.05$) are recommended to be further analysed in IPA. The results from the paired-samples t-test also help to highlight the areas that are respondents' actual concerns. Therefore, the attributes with a p-value higher than 0.05 should be eliminated and should not be plotted in I-P mapping for further interpretation.

The last section presents the interpretation of the IPA. Empirical means and a diagonal line with discrepancies have been applied in this study. Rial, Varela and Real (2008) indicate that the discrepancy of the attributes (distance

to the diagonal) is considered an indicator for prioritizing the improvement of services. A number of researchers used the diagonal line to separate regions of differing priorities in which the region above the line represents a high priority for improvement and the region below represents a low priority (Hawes and Rao, 1985; Slack, 1994). The results of tests of the differences between the importance and performance of each factor of the five cities have been plotted on the IPA. IPA results will be presented together with the factors that need to be prioritized in developing MICE cities in Thailand.

7.2 Data Collection and Preparation for the Quantitative Data Analysis

The quantitative phase used questionnaires to collect data. These questionnaires were distributed all over the country but focused on five MICE cities: Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Khon Kaen, Pattaya, and Phuket, selected by the TCEB as MICE cities in Thailand. Participants were event planners, travel agents, hotels, and other related service providers. An email that included details of the project and the data collection was provided before the distribution of the questionnaire, following the work of Dillman (2002), as mentioned in Chapter 5. A sample was obtained ($n = 1092$) based on the sampling frame set out in Section 5.8. In the pilot study, 50 companies were emailed a link to the questionnaire in November 2017. From this pilot test, there was a bounce-back rate of 3.2% ($n=30$). An initial check of data for accuracy was carried out, followed by the basic preliminary analysis. All items on the questionnaire were being answered as intended and initial indications suggested the questionnaire was operating as it should. Following this, the remainder of the sample ($n=1042$), were sent an invitation and an official letter that informed them of the project and the researcher's contact details in November 2017. Some of these emails proved to be out-of-date and 147 email addresses were removed; another 21 automatic out-of-office emails were received. Therefore, in this primary study, 874 surveys were delivered and 11% ($n=92$) response rate was achieved. This is low compared to other online surveys (Deutskens et al., 2004) and so a new strategy was applied to boost the response rate, calling each business to ask for an appropriate email address. This process revealed that 57 businesses had closed down and a further 32 declined to participate. Thus, in the end a total of 856 surveys were collected. In total, 253 questionnaires were not been fully

completed and so the findings presented here refer to the analysis of 266 online surveys.

Table 7.1 summarises the online questionnaires obtained from each target company. The majority of the companies are event organizing companies (41.7%), followed by hotels (21.8%) and equal numbers of travel agencies and others such as zoos and national parks (12.4%). The reason for the high number of completed questionnaires from organizers' companies is that they genuinely work in the MICE industry, and thus could answer the questions most easily. The table also shows that the majority of respondents (n=89) were managers (33%). It should be noted that managers were confident to give information, feeling that they know about MICE industry, perhaps more than the owners and directors of the company. However, owners were also happy to participate (n=55). Directors and others (i.e. those who preferred not to disclose their role) were present in the sample in almost the same numbers (n=17 and 16 respectively). The respondents were asked to state how long their business had been operating (see Table 7.1). The majority had been running for 1-5 years, which may be because the MICE industry is still relatively new to Thailand; 20% had been running 6-10 years and 18% 11-15 years, while 17% have been working in the MICE industry for more than 20 years.

Table 7.1 An overview of respondents' profiles

| Type of Business | N | % |
|---|-----|-------|
| Organizer | 111 | 41.7 |
| Hotel | 58 | 21.8 |
| Travel Agency | 32 | 12.0 |
| Venue | 8 | 3.0 |
| Other | 57 | 21.4 |
| Position/Role in Business | | |
| Owner | 55 | 20.7 |
| Director | 16 | 6.0 |
| Manager | 89 | 33 |
| Staff | 19 | 7.1 |
| Other | 17 | 6.40 |
| Length of Time Business Operational | | |
| 1-5 years | 109 | 41 |
| 6-10 years | 53 | 20 |
| 11-15 years | 37 | 14 |
| 16-20 years | 21 | 8 |
| More than 20 years | 45 | 17 |
| Respondent's Target Client Sector | | |
| Meeting | 69 | 26 |
| Incentive | 40 | 15 |
| Convention | 32 | 12 |
| Exhibition | 82 | 31 |
| Othes | 43 | 16 |
| Experience in MICE industry in the year 2016 | | |
| 10 occasions or fewer | 112 | 42 |
| 11-20 times | 63 | 24 |
| 21-30 times | 19 | 7 |
| 31-50 times | 21 | 8 |
| More than 50 | 51 | 19 |
| Average No of Participants in Events Organised | | |
| Fewer than 15 | 3 | 1.2 |
| 16-25 | 14 | 5.10 |
| 51-100 | 136 | 51.0 |
| 101-200 | 31 | 11.70 |
| 201-500 | 29 | 10.90 |
| Over 500 | - | - |

The most common experience that the participants had in the last five years was of exhibitions (31%). 26% had been involved in meetings, which might because a meeting does not need an expert or a consultant, as each company or business could manage the meeting by themselves. In terms of the type of event, conventions are the smallest group in this current study at 12%. Respondents were asked about their workload and were asked to indicate in general how many events of all types they had organized in 2016. The largest group (42%;

n=106) had organized ten events or fewer in 2016. This might be because the majority of respondents have been only operating for less than five years. 24% had organised events 11-20 times in 2016. However, 19% of the companies had more than fifty events in 2016. The majority (51%) of respondents' events in one year (2016) had over fifty participants in each event. It could be assumed that most of the events that the respondents have organized in the last five years were exhibitions, explaining why they had so many participants.

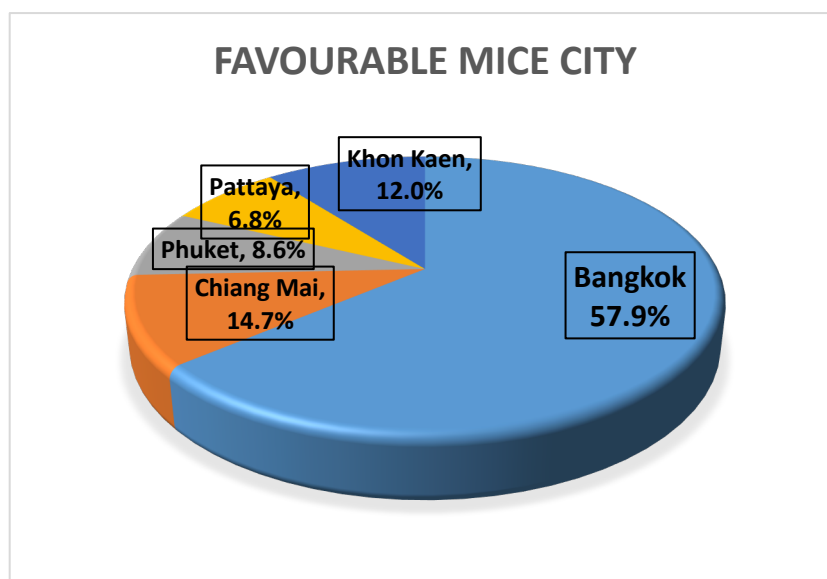


Figure 7.1 The best MICE city from the participants' perspectives

Furthermore, the questions in this section asked respondents to rate the five MICE cities in terms of facilities and services. The results (presented in Figure 7.1) show that 58% of the respondents consider Bangkok the most favorable MICE city, followed by Chiang Mai (14.7%), Khon Kaen (12%), Phuket (8.6%) and Pattaya (6.8%). Lastly, the research aims to identify the performance of MICE cities by asking participants to rate the levels of importance and performance of individual factors.

The participants were asked which city had respondents worked the most over the last 5 years. The results presents in table 7.2 presents the number of respondents per city.

Table 7.2 Number of respondents per city

| City | Number | Percentage |
|------------|--------|------------|
| Bangkok | 154 | 57.8 |
| Chiang Mai | 39 | 14.6 |
| Khon Kaen | 30 | 11.2 |
| Pattaya | 20 | 8.0 |
| Phuket | 23 | 8.6 |

As expected, the majority of participants had the most experience in Bangkok at more than 57%. The second was Chiang Mai which is 14.6% followed by Khon Kaen 11.2%, Phuket and Pattaya were slightly different 8.6% and 8%. According to the TCEB databases, more than 65% of stakeholders in the MICE industry are based in Bangkok. Similar percentages of stakeholders in Phuket and Chiang Mai. While less than 10% of stakeholders are based on Pattaya and Khon Kaen. More discussion of the performance of each city is presented in Chapter 8.

7.3 Data screening

Data screening was undertaken before further analysis was conducted to check problematic cases. As noted earlier, 266 surveys from stakeholders in the MICE industry were collected. The normality of the data is a fundamental assumption in multivariate statistical analysis. There are two types of testing, namely univariate and multivariate normality (Hair et al., 2010). The authors explain that univariate normality involves testing for a single variable, whereas multivariate normality is testing for a combination of two or more variables, in which each individual variable and their combinations are present in the distribution (Hair et al., 2010). In this study, univariate normality was used to evaluate the normality of distribution. To measure the normal distribution of univariate normality, either visual histograms or statistical tests (e.g. Skewness and Kurtosis, Kolmogorov-Smirnov, Shapiro-Wilk) are undertaken. However, there is a limitation to the checking of normality via histograms as it can be very subjective. Therefore, statistical tests, Skewness and Kurtosis in particular, were utilized to measure the normality in this research.

The results found that the data is approximately normal, as all the questions included in the analysis had Skewness and Kurtosis ranging from +1.96 and -1.96, which according to Field (2013) who proposed a cut-off point of 2 and -2, are acceptable to suggest data is normally distributed. According to Hair et al. (2006), the researcher must not only judge the extent to which the variable's distribution is normal, but also needs to consider the sample size. The authors (*ibid*) suggest that the test is significantly less useful in smaller samples, but in large sample sizes over 200 data-points level of non-normality is negligible (Hairs et al. 2006). There was one question (transportation1) that had Skewness and Kurtosis ranging from 2.87 and 2.98 and 2.10 and .158 (transportation2), however and light of reasons given above, the researcher decided to keep the data for further investigation.

In terms of missing data, since the quantitative of the study was online survey. The survey was conducted online and the software could detect incomplete surveys; therefore, the analysis did not include incomplete surveys and there are no missing cases in the final data. Finally, outliers were observed in order to check for response bias. Field (2013) suggests that outliers can be assessed if participants answer in exactly the same way (with a standard deviation of zero). The results found there are four outliers in this research. However, the researcher decided to not remove the outliers. According to Hair et al. (2006), outliers should be retained unless it is demonstrable that they are truly aberrant and not representative of any observation in the population.

7.4 Assessment of validity and reliability of BESTBET framework

Chapter 4 considered the elements from the BESTBET framework and the addition factors from the interview (a total of 21 elements) were investigated. Table 6.2 presents the twenty-one factors were found to be significant determinants of developing business tourism destinations and business tourism benchmarking in the current study. The root of the thesis is the examination of whether or not factors in the BESTBET framework are an appropriate tool for destination benchmarking in a Thai context, as well as to critically evaluate the key factors that contribute to destination benchmarking practice. Therefore, it was hoped to develop the conceptual logic of MICE destination benchmarking,

and to enhance understanding of how to identify both additional factors and best practice in order to become a MICE-destination.

The validity of these drivers had been confirmed in other studies (Haven-Tang, Jones, and Webb, 2006; Lee et al. 2016), so only the reliability of the scale needed to be examined. This involved examining Cronbach's alpha. Table 7.3 summarises the results, in which the reliability of a scale indicates how free it is from random error. Item-to-total correlation coefficients for the scale ranged from .44 to .79, exceeding the minimum threshold of .30 (Pallant, 2013). Cronbach's alpha score for the scale is 0.95, which exceeds the minimum criteria for establishing scale reliability (>.70). Therefore, there was no need to force the elimination of any items in this factor. These results indicated that the facilities scale is reliability.

Table 7.3 Reliability of facilities factor

| Scale Item | Item to total Correlations | Cronbach's Alpha |
|--|----------------------------|------------------|
| <i>1) Leadership</i> | | 0.95 |
| 1. Policies and subvention (financial or in-kind support for a destination) | .71 | |
| 2. Presentation (promoting an image of the city as a great MICE city) | .64 | |
| <i>1) Infrastructure</i> | | |
| 3. Transportation infrastructure in the destination | .47 | |
| 4. Quality of venue facilities | .58 | |
| 5. High standard technology | .67 | |
| <i>3) Bidding</i> | | |
| 6. The bidding process is reliable | .64 | |
| 7. Supportive local or relevant agencies in the city in the process of bidding | .62 | |
| <i>4) Ambassador</i> | | |
| 8. Symbol or creation of a unique composition which supported the ambition to be a MICE city | .74 | |
| <i>5) Skills</i> | | |
| 9. Experience and knowledge of workers in the MICE industry | .62 | |
| 10. Availability and sufficiency of workers in the MICE industry. | .62 | |
| 11. Foreign language knowledge | .64 | |

| | | |
|--|-----|--|
| 12. Ability to communicate the workflow of the workers in the MICE industry | .70 | |
| 13. Training courses | .74 | |
| <i>6) Networking</i> | | |
| 14. Networking (Communication) | .67 | |
| <i>7) Branding</i> | | |
| 15. An awareness and realization of what it means to be a MICE city among local people | .73 | |
| <i>Additional factors</i> | | |
| 16. Risk prevention | .79 | |
| 17. Risk management | .77 | |
| 18. Tourist attractions in the MICE city | .91 | |
| 19. The reputation of the city is well known | .62 | |
| 20. Annual events that are unique and recognizable | .74 | |
| 21. One-stop service | .72 | |

7.5 Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA)

Chapter 4 indicated that importance-performance analysis (IPA) is a technique that identifies the gap between the importance and performance of products and services, seeking to quantify the quality of the product and service (William and Pessemier, 1973). The null hypothesis of IPA is that the level of importance and performance of attributes for products or services are different (Lai & Lam, 2010; Lai & Hitchcock, 2015). To confirm this hypothesis, repeated measures of paired t-test were performed, as the results will indicate the gaps of importance among the attributes

7.6 Measuring the gap between importance and performance (paired samples t-test)

Individual paired-samples t-tests were conducted to measure the gaps between importance and performance for individual attributes. O'Neill and Palmer (2004) suggest that a performance gap is identified only when respondents' importance scores are shown to significantly differ from corresponding performance scores for particular attributes. Therefore, individual paired-samples t-tests were conducted to confirm the significant differences among the levels of importance of the attributes and their respective scores for

performance. Lai and Hitchcock (2014) suggest it is very important to conduct individual paired-samples t-tests because only the attributes that show a significant difference ($p < 0.05$) should be further analysed in order to highlight the areas that are respondents' actual concerns.

7.6.1 Result for Thailand

Seventeen attributes showed a statistically significant difference ($p < 0.05$) in mean scores between importance and performance: *Bidding Process* (0.44), *Support* (0.42), *Good represent* (0.28), *Symbol/Ambassador* (0.25), *Awareness* (0.45), *One-stop service* (0.41), *Communication* (0.33), *Policies* (0.16), *Transport* (0.58), *Technology* (0.14), *Workflow* (0.39), *Experience* (0.46), *Foreign languages* (0.33), *Availability* (0.37), *Risk management* (0.40), *Risk prevention* (0.43), and *Training courses* (0.32).

Table 7.4 Results of paired-sample t-test (5-point Likert-type scale) of Thailand (n=266)

| | Scale Item | Importance | | Performance | | Difference | | t-value | Sig |
|----|------------------------------------|------------|------|-------------|------|------------|------|---------|------|
| | | Mean | S.D. | Mean | S.D. | Mean | S.D. | | |
| 1 | Bidding Process | 4.30 | .796 | 3.86 | 1.08 | 0.44 | 0.29 | 6.65 | .000 |
| 2 | Support | 4.24 | .810 | 3.82 | 1.04 | 0.42 | 0.24 | 6.15 | .000 |
| 3 | Presentation (good representation) | 4.47 | .696 | 4.187 | .870 | 0.28 | 0.17 | 5.20 | .000 |
| 4 | Symbol/Ambassador | 4.32 | .781 | 4.07 | .917 | 0.25 | 0.14 | 4.52 | .000 |
| 5 | Awareness | 4.30 | .805 | 3.85 | .994 | 0.45 | 0.19 | 7.90 | .000 |
| 6 | One-stop service | 4.32 | .855 | 3.91 | 1.09 | 0.41 | 0.24 | 5.10 | .000 |
| 7 | Communication and Networking | 4.44 | .643 | 4.11 | .862 | 0.33 | 0.22 | 6.10 | .000 |
| 8 | Policies | 4.27 | .711 | 4.11 | .853 | 0.16 | 0.14 | 2.74 | .007 |
| 9 | Venue | 4.46 | .691 | 4.42 | .633 | 0.04 | 0.58 | .791 | .430 |
| 10 | Transport | 4.81 | .431 | 4.23 | 1.06 | 0.58 | 0.63 | 8.52 | .000 |
| 11 | Technology | 4.54 | .583 | 4.40 | .672 | 0.14 | 0.09 | 2.99 | .003 |
| 12 | Workflow | 4.48 | .628 | 4.09 | .901 | 0.39 | 0.27 | 7.13 | .000 |
| 13 | Experience | 4.50 | .652 | 4.04 | .923 | 0.46 | 0.27 | 7.92 | .000 |
| 14 | Foreign languages | 4.44 | .619 | 4.11 | .957 | 0.33 | 0.33 | 6.95 | .000 |
| 15 | Availability | 4.44 | .619 | 4.07 | .933 | 0.37 | 0.31 | 6.54 | .000 |
| 16 | Risk management | 4.35 | .754 | 3.95 | .978 | 0.40 | 0.22 | 7.01 | .000 |
| 17 | Risk prevention | 4.38 | .724 | 3.94 | .979 | 0.43 | 0.25 | 8.08 | .000 |
| 18 | Training courses | 4.31 | .670 | 3.99 | .932 | 0.32 | 0.26 | 5.32 | .000 |
| 19 | Tourist attractions | 4.18 | .853 | 4.17 | .877 | 0.01 | 0.02 | .070 | .944 |
| 20 | Reputation of the city | 4.24 | .796 | 4.33 | .773 | 0.09 | 0.02 | .176 | .078 |
| 21 | Annual events | 4.20 | .805 | 4.21 | .768 | 0.01 | .037 | .299 | .765 |

These results indicate that stakeholders should put more effort into addressing issues with transportation, as this was found to have the greatest difference, followed by experience, awareness, bidding process and risk prevention. On the other hand, stakeholders need to devote a small amount of effort to technology, as it has the smallest gap at less than 0.2 (Lai and Hitchcock, 2015). The remaining attributes (*Policies, Venue, Tourist Attractions, Annual events and Reputation of the City*) were not found to have statistically significant differences between their mean scores for importance and performance. This indicates that respondents believe these attributes are delivered to a standard that is commensurate with their perceived level of importance. Interestingly, although *Reputation of the city* was not significant, the attribute's performance was rated higher than its importance score. This means Thailand has a very good reputation for MICE cities from the respondents' perspective.

7.6.2 Bangkok

Sixteen attributes had significant differences in scores between importance and performance levels: *bidding process (0.42), support (0.46), Presentation (0.22), Symbol (0.17), Awareness (0.34), awareness (0.34), one stop service (0.29), communication (0.32), Policy (0.13), transport (0.61), workflow (0.39), experience (0.48), foreign languages (0.44), availability (0.38), risk management (0.40), risk prevention (0.44), training courses (0.33).*

The results also indicate that stakeholders should put more effort into being supportive, the bidding process, presentation, symbols, awareness, transport, one stop-services, communication and networking, policy, workflow, experience, foreign languages, availability, risk management, risk prevention, and training courses. On the other hand, stakeholders need to devote a small amount of effort to an annual event. The remaining attributes (*promoting a good image of the city as a great MICE city, symbols, venues, technology, tourist attractions, representation of the city, and annual events*) were not found to have statistically significant differences between their mean scores for importance and performance. This indicates that respondents believe these attributes are delivered to a standard that is commensurate with their perceived level of importance. Likewise with Bangkok, *Reputation of the city* was not significant

but the attribute's performance was rated higher than its importance score, indicating that the expectations of the respondents were exceeded.

Table 7.5 results of paired-sample t-test (5-point Likert-type scale) of Bangkok (n=157)

| | Scale Item | Importance | | Performance | | Difference | | t-Value | Sig |
|----|------------------------|------------|------|-------------|-------|------------|-------|---------|------|
| | | Mean | S.D. | Mean | S.D. | Mean | S.D. | | |
| 1 | Bidding Process | 4.25 | .866 | 3.82 | 1.174 | .429 | 1.154 | 4.609 | .000 |
| 2 | Support | 4.24 | .825 | 3.77 | 1.152 | .468 | 1.161 | 4.996 | .000 |
| 3 | Presentation | 4.40 | .727 | 4.17 | .831 | .227 | .821 | 3.437 | .001 |
| 4 | Symbol | 4.19 | .809 | 4.02 | .960 | .175 | .944 | 2.305 | .022 |
| 5 | Awareness | 4.19 | .841 | 3.85 | 1.008 | .344 | .843 | 5.066 | .000 |
| 6 | One-stop service | 4.21 | .883 | 3.91 | 1.145 | .299 | 1.085 | 3.415 | .001 |
| 7 | Communication | 4.42 | .655 | 4.10 | .913 | .325 | .907 | 4.444 | .000 |
| 8 | Policies | 4.24 | .715 | 4.10 | .841 | .136 | .856 | 1.977 | .050 |
| 9 | Venue | 4.45 | .627 | 4.40 | .680 | .058 | .777 | .933 | .352 |
| 10 | Transport | 4.81 | .429 | 4.19 | 1.089 | .617 | 1.139 | 6.723 | .000 |
| 11 | Technology | 4.53 | .585 | 4.42 | .674 | .110 | .719 | 1.905 | .059 |
| 12 | Workflow | 4.45 | .617 | 4.09 | .931 | .364 | .942 | 4.793 | .000 |
| 13 | Experience | 4.51 | .597 | 4.03 | .966 | .481 | .880 | 6.777 | .000 |
| 14 | Foreign languages | 4.53 | .639 | 4.08 | .996 | .442 | .963 | 5.688 | .000 |
| 15 | Availability | 4.44 | .605 | 4.06 | .972 | .383 | .951 | 4.999 | .000 |
| 16 | Risk management | 4.27 | .801 | 3.86 | 1.013 | .409 | .954 | 5.322 | .000 |
| 17 | Risk prevention | 4.35 | .763 | 3.90 | 1.034 | .448 | .893 | 6.224 | .000 |
| 18 | Training courses | 4.29 | .613 | 3.95 | .992 | .331 | .991 | 4.149 | .000 |
| 19 | Tourist attractions | 4.10 | .869 | 4.07 | .923 | .026 | .956 | .337 | .737 |
| 20 | Reputation of the city | 4.19 | .782 | 4.25 | .835 | -.058 | .865 | -.838 | .403 |
| 21 | Annual events | 4.12 | .824 | 4.13 | .838 | -.013 | .943 | -.171 | .864 |

7.6.3 Chiang Mai

Ten attributes had a significant gap between importance and performance in Chiang Mai: *bidding process (0.47)*, *support (0.39)*, *good representation (0.66)*, *awareness (0.63)*, *transport (0.53)*, *workflow (0.34)*, *foreign languages (0.26)*, *availability of workers (0.39)*, *risk prevention (0.39)*, and *training (0.29)*.

Table 7.6 results of paired-sample t-test (5-point Likert-type scale) of Chiang Mai (n=39)

| | Scale Item | Importance | | Performance | | Difference | | t-Value | Sig |
|----|---------------------------|------------|------|-------------|-------|------------|------|---------|-------------|
| | | Mean | S.D. | Mean | S.D. | Mean | S.D. | | |
| 1 | Bidding Process | 4.56 | .552 | 4.11 | .981 | 0.47 | 0.43 | 2.63 | .001 |
| 2 | Support | 4.39 | .679 | 4.00 | .805 | 0.39 | 0.13 | 2.25 | .003 |
| 3 | Presentation | 4.79 | .474 | 4.13 | .963 | 0.66 | 0.49 | 3.97 | .000 |
| 4 | Symbols | 4.47 | .557 | 4.29 | .802 | 0.18 | 0.25 | 1.37 | .181 |
| 5 | Awareness | 4.50 | .688 | 3.87 | .906 | 0.63 | 0.22 | 4.13 | .000 |
| 6 | One-stop service | 4.34 | .780 | 4.18 | 0.833 | 0.16 | 0.10 | 1.06 | .295 |
| 7 | Communication /Networking | 4.55 | .555 | 4.26 | .685 | 0.29 | 0.13 | 1.98 | .054 |
| 8 | Policies | 4.52 | .557 | 4.26 | .787 | 0.29 | 0.23 | 1.92 | .062 |
| 9 | Venue | 4.39 | .638 | 4.50 | .762 | -.11 | 0.12 | -.681 | .500 |
| 10 | Transport | 4.79 | .413 | 4.26 | 1.03 | 0.53 | 0.62 | 2.99 | .005 |
| 11 | Technology | 4.63 | .488 | 4.42 | .642 | 0.21 | 0.15 | 1.53 | .130 |
| 12 | Workflow | 4.55 | .555 | 4.21 | .741 | 0.34 | 0.34 | 3.15 | .003 |
| 13 | Experience | 4.47 | .655 | 4.21 | .811 | 0.26 | 0.16 | 1.65 | .106 |
| 14 | Foreign languages | 4.55 | .555 | 4.29 | .867 | 0.26 | 0.31 | 2.04 | .048 |
| 15 | Availability | 4.47 | .603 | 4.08 | .750 | 0.39 | 0.46 | 3.58 | .001 |
| 16 | Risk management | 4.47 | .645 | 4.18 | .896 | 0.29 | 0.25 | 1.76 | .086 |
| 17 | Risk prevention | 4.50 | .604 | 4.11 | .981 | 0.39 | 0.38 | 2.25 | .030 |
| 18 | Training courses | 4.47 | .603 | 4.18 | .652 | 0.29 | 0.05 | 2.43 | .020 |
| 19 | Tourist attractions | 4.34 | .909 | 4.32 | 1.02 | 0.27 | 0.03 | .240 | .812 |
| 20 | Reputation of the city | 4.42 | .890 | 4.45 | .724 | -.027 | 0.65 | -.227 | .822 |
| 21 | Annual events | 4.34 | .878 | 4.47 | .725 | -0.13 | .015 | -1.30 | .201 |

The gap relating to the presentation of the city was of the greatest significant, followed by *awareness*, *transportation*, *bidding process*, *supportive*, *availability*, *workflow one-stop service*, and *training courses*. Therefore, the stakeholders should attend to improving these first five attributes. The remaining attributes (*symbols*, *policies*, *venues*, *one-stop services*, *Networking/Communication*, *policy*, *venue*, *technology*, *experience*, *foreign languages*, *risk prevention*, *risk management*, *training courses*, *tourist attractions*, *representation of the city*, and *annual events*) did not have statistically significant differences between the mean scores for importance and performance.

7.6.4 Khon Kaen

The results show that there are eight attributes with a significant gap between importance and performance: *symbols (.02)*, *communication (.40)*, *venue (.03)* followed by *transport (.46)*, *workflow (.40)*, *experience (.63)*, *Venue (.04)*, *risk management (.40)*, and *risk prevention (.26)*. All of the factors that the stakeholders considered critical factors need to be improved for developing Khon Kaen as a MICE city. The remaining attributes were not found to have statistically significant differences between their mean scores for importance and performance.

Table 7.7 Results of paired-sample t-test (5-point Likert-type scale) of Khon Kaen (n=30)

| | Scale Item | Importance | | Performance | | Difference | | t-value | Sig |
|----|------------------------|------------|------|-------------|-------|------------|------|---------|-------------|
| | | Mean | S.D. | Mean | S.D. | Mean | S.D. | | |
| 1 | Bidding Process | 4.133 | .628 | 4.033 | .7644 | .100 | .547 | 1.00 | .326 |
| 2 | Support | 4.133 | .776 | 3.966 | .668 | .166 | .833 | 1.09 | .283 |
| 3 | Presentation | 4.466 | .571 | 4.500 | .629 | -.033 | .556 | -.328 | .745 |
| 4 | Symbols | 4.500 | .682 | 4.266 | .691 | .233 | .626 | 2.04 | .050 |
| 5 | Awareness | 4.400 | .723 | 4.133 | .860 | .266 | .868 | 1.68 | .103 |
| 6 | One-stop service | 4.300 | .651 | 4.000 | .946 | .300 | .836 | 1.94 | .059 |
| 7 | Communication | 4.500 | .629 | 4.100 | .607 | .400 | .674 | 3.24 | .003 |
| 8 | Policies | 4.200 | .714 | 4.133 | .776 | .066 | .691 | .528 | .601 |
| 9 | Venue | 4.666 | .546 | 4.366 | .718 | .300 | .794 | 2.06 | .048 |
| 10 | Transport | 4.800 | .550 | 4.333 | .802 | .466 | .776 | 3.29 | .003 |
| 11 | Technology | 4.500 | .731 | 4.266 | .691 | .233 | .897 | 1.42 | .165 |
| 12 | Workflow | 4.500 | .731 | 4.100 | .844 | .400 | .813 | 2.69 | .012 |
| 13 | Experience | 4.633 | .718 | 4.000 | .870 | .633 | .964 | 3.59 | .001 |
| 14 | Foreign languages | 4.333 | .660 | 4.100 | .922 | .233 | 1.07 | 1.19 | .243 |
| 15 | Availability | 4.400 | .674 | 4.200 | .924 | .200 | .846 | 1.29 | .206 |
| 16 | Risk management | 4.433 | .678 | 4.033 | .850 | .400 | .723 | 3.26 | .005 |
| 17 | Risk prevention | 4.233 | .678 | 3.966 | .764 | .266 | .691 | 2.11 | .043 |
| 18 | Training courses | 4.33 | .884 | 4.166 | .949 | .166 | 1.08 | .841 | .407 |
| 19 | Tourist attractions | 4.066 | .868 | 4.100 | .758 | -.033 | .764 | -.239 | .813 |
| 20 | Reputation of the city | 4.133 | .776 | 4.266 | .691 | -.133 | .860 | -.849 | .403 |
| 21 | Annual events | 4.233 | .727 | 4.100 | .661 | .133 | .681 | 1.072 | .293 |

7.6.5 Pattaya

The results of paired-samples t-test for Pattaya are presented in Table 7.8. The results show that there are five attributes with a significant gap between importance and performance: *Support* and *Awareness* (both 0.55), *Venues* (0.15), *Transport* (0.35) and *Risk prevention* (0.40). The remaining attributes were not found to have statistically significant differences between their mean scores for importance and performance.

Table 7.8 Results of paired-sample t-test (5-point Likert-type scale) of Pattaya (n=20)

| | Scale Item | Importance | | Performance | | Difference | | t-value | Sig |
|----|------------------------|------------|------|-------------|------|------------|------|---------|-------------|
| | | Mean | S.D. | Mean | S.D. | Mean | S.D. | | |
| 1 | Bidding Process | 4.35 | .813 | 3.75 | 1.08 | 0.60 | 0.40 | 2.179 | .379 |
| 2 | Support | 4.20 | .894 | 3.65 | 1.04 | 0.55 | 0.29 | 1.868 | .049 |
| 3 | Presentation | 4.45 | .686 | 4.10 | .870 | 0.35 | .39 | 1.505 | .577 |
| 4 | Symbol/Ambassador | 4.35 | .933 | 3.95 | .917 | 0.40 | 0.07 | 2.027 | 1.000 |
| 5 | Awareness | 4.30 | .801 | 3.75 | .994 | 0.55 | 0.27 | 2.342 | .042 |
| 6 | One-stop service | 4.30 | .801 | 3.85 | 1.09 | 0.45 | 0.34 | 2.438 | .077 |
| 7 | Communication | 4.35 | .745 | 4.10 | .862 | 0.25 | 0.46 | 1.097 | .149 |
| 8 | Policies | 4.06 | .887 | 4.05 | .853 | 0.01 | 0.13 | 2.179 | .057 |
| 9 | Venue | 4.60 | .598 | 4.45 | .633 | 0.15 | 0.09 | -.900 | .030 |
| 10 | Transport | 4.90 | .308 | 4.55 | 1.06 | 0.35 | 0.30 | 2.101 | .025 |
| 11 | Technology | 4.55 | .605 | 4.45 | .672 | 0.10 | 0.10 | -.567 | .287 |
| 12 | Workflow | 4.35 | .671 | 4.05 | .901 | 0.30 | 0.22 | 1.371 | .186 |
| 13 | Experience | 4.30 | .733 | 4.05 | .923 | 0.25 | 0.15 | 1.045 | .309 |
| 14 | Foreign languages | 4.45 | .605 | 4.20 | .957 | 0.20 | 0.35 | 1.228 | .234 |
| 15 | Availability | 4.35 | .745 | 4.10 | .933 | 0.25 | 0.22 | .925 | .367 |
| 16 | Risk management | 4.35 | .745 | 3.95 | .978 | 0.40 | 0.2 | 2.027 | .057 |
| 17 | Risk prevention | 4.35 | .745 | 3.95 | .979 | 0.40 | 0.20 | 2.179 | .042 |
| 18 | Training courses | 4.10 | .641 | 3.85 | .932 | 0.25 | 0.10 | 1.751 | .096 |
| 19 | Tourist attractions | 4.50 | .607 | 4.35 | .877 | 0.15 | 0.12 | 1.000 | .330 |
| 20 | Reputation of the city | 4.55 | .510 | 4.40 | .773 | 0.15 | 0.09 | -1.37 | .186 |
| 21 | Annual events | 4.50 | .513 | 4.40 | .768 | 0.10 | 0.01 | -1.00 | .330 |

7.6.6 Phuket

Table 7.9 shows that there are fifteen attributes with a significant gap between importance and performance: *bidding process (0.72) presentation (0.59), symbols (0.72), awareness (1.00), one-stop service (0.77), Networking/Communication (0.59), Transport (0.77), technology (0.40), workflow (0.77), foreign languages (0.77), experience (0.59), availability (0.63), risk management (0.63), risk prevention (0.81), and training (0.63)*. The remaining attributes were not found to have statistically significant differences between their mean scores for importance and performance.

Table 7.9 Results of paired-sample t-test (5-point Likert-type scale) of Phuket (n=23)

| | Scale Item | importance | | performance | | Difference | | t-value | Sig |
|----|------------------------------|------------|-------|-------------|-------|------------|-------|---------|-------------|
| | | Mean | S.D. | Mean | S.D. | Mean | S.D. | | |
| 1 | Bidding Process | 4.36 | .790 | 3.64 | .848 | .727 | .70 | 4.85 | .000 |
| 2 | Support | 4.18 | .907 | 3.73 | .985 | .455 | 1.0 | 2.01 | .057 |
| 3 | Presentation | 4.50 | .802 | 3.91 | 1.019 | .591 | 1.2 | 2.27 | .034 |
| 4 | Symbol/Ambassador | 4.59 | .796 | 3.86 | .990 | .727 | .88 | 3.86 | .001 |
| 5 | Awareness | 4.50 | .802 | 3.50 | 1.144 | 1.000 | 1.19 | 3.92 | .001 |
| 6 | One-stop service | 4.18 | 1.053 | 3.41 | 1.221 | .773 | 1.23 | 2.94 | .008 |
| 7 | Networking/ Communication | 4.45 | .671 | 3.86 | .941 | .591 | 1.09 | 2.52 | .020 |
| 8 | Policies | 4.36 | .790 | 3.95 | 1.133 | .409 | 1.33 | 1.43 | 1.65 |
| 9 | Venue | 4.41 | .796 | 4.32 | .716 | .091 | 1.19 | .35 | .724 |
| 10 | Transport | 4.77 | .429 | 4.00 | 1.480 | .773 | 1.5 | 2.30 | .031 |
| 11 | Technology | 4.64 | .581 | 4.23 | .752 | .409 | .85 | 2.24 | .036 |
| 12 | Workflow | 4.64 | .658 | 3.86 | 1.082 | .773 | 1.1 | 3.26 | .004 |
| 13 | Experience | 3.82 | .958 | 4.41 | .854 | .591 | 1.1 | 2.34 | .029 |
| 14 | Foreign languages | 3.95 | .950 | 4.73 | .631 | .773 | .97 | 3.72 | .001 |
| 15 | Availability | 4.55 | .596 | 3.91 | 1.019 | .636 | 1.002 | 2.978 | .007 |
| 16 | Risk management | 4.64 | .658 | 4.00 | 1.069 | .636 | 1.093 | 2.731 | .013 |
| 17 | Risk prevention | 4.64 | .658 | 3.82 | .958 | .818 | .958 | 4.006 | .001 |
| 18 | Training courses | 4.45 | .800 | 3.82 | 1.053 | .636 | 1.217 | 2.453 | .023 |
| 19 | Tourist attractions | 4.36 | .727 | 4.55 | .596 | -.182 | .795 | -1.07 | .296 |
| 20 | Reputation of the city | 4.32 | .894 | 4.50 | .673 | -.182 | .958 | -0.890 | .383 |
| 21 | Annual events | 4.32 | .839 | 4.23 | .528 | .773 | .610 | .699 | .492 |

7.7 IPA Results

The individual paired-samples t-test from section 7.6 confirmed that there were significant differences between the scores for importance and performance for several attributes. These results can also be viewed as an effective means of benchmarking against competitors (Chen, 2014). The significant attributes from the paired t-test results have been plotted on the IPA graphs (Figure 7.2). As noted in Chapter 5, the scale-centred and the data-centred quadrant approaches and the diagonal methods used in this study are widely used in a variety of contexts, while their predictive validity is rarely examined. The choice of research design varies depending on different research settings and researchers' objectives.

The data-centred quadrants approach and the mean diagonal line model suggested by Rial, Varela and Real (2008) were applied in this study to pursue the understanding of the role of the key selected attributes in the selection decision, and to identify a set of attributes to prioritise. The attributes that have an importance score higher than the performance score fall into the priority area. The discrepancy of the attributes (distance to the diagonal) is considered an indicator for prioritizing the improvement of product and service.

I. Keep up the good work

- *Presentation (3)* was found here, referring to Thailand as a whole (important mean score 4.47/performance mean score 4.18), Bangkok (4.40/4.17), and Chiang Mai (4.79/4.13)
- *Networking/Communication (7)* was found here for Thailand as a whole (important mean score 4.44/performance mean score 4.11) and Bangkok (4.42/4.10).
- *Venue(9)* has been found in Khon Kaen (4.66/4.36), Pattaya (4.60/4.45)
- *Transport (10)* was found in this quadrant, referring to Thailand as a whole and all MICE cities. Scores were as follows for Thailand (importance mean score 4.81/performance mean score 4.23), Bangkok (4.19/4.81), Chiang Mai (4.79/4.26), Khon Kaen (4.80/4.33) Pattaya (4.90/4.55) and Phuket (4.77/4.00).
- *Technology (11)* only found in Phuket (importance and performance mean score 4.64/4.23).

- *Workflow (12)* appeared in this quadrant only for Thailand as a whole (4.48/4.09) and Bangkok (4.45/4.09).
- *Foreign languages (14)* was found only in Thailand as a whole (important mean score 4.44, performance mean score 4.11) and Bangkok (4.53/4.08).
- *Availability of workers (15)* was found in Thailand as a whole (4.44/4.07) and Bangkok (4.44/4.06).
- *Risk management (16)* only found in *Phuket* (important mean score 4.64, performance mean score 4.00).

II. Concentrate here

The attributes in this quadrant are those that stakeholders consider highly important, but low performance. The majority of attributes in this quadrant were found in *Phuket*. The attributes that the stakeholders were most concerned about were:

- *Good presentation (3)* found as a high importance but low performance in *Phuket* (mean score 4.50/performance score 3.91). Likewise, *Symbols (4)* (mean score 4.59/performance score 3.86) for *Phuket* further,
- *Awareness (5)* (4.50/3.50);
- *Networking/Communication (7)* (4.45/3.86);
- *Workflow (12)* (4.64/3.86);
- *Availability of workers (15)* (4.55/3.91)
- *Risk prevention (17)* (4.64/3.82); and
- *Training courses (18)* (4.45/3.82)

The only factor in this quadrant that refers to the whole of Thailand and Khon Kaen is *Experience (13)* (4.50/4.04) and (4.63/4.00) and *Bidding process (1)* in Chiang Mai (4.56/4.11)

III. Low priority

The attributes in this quadrant are those that stakeholders consider as a low importance and low performance, as follows:

- *Bidding (1)* was found in Thailand as a whole (mean score 4.30 and performance score 3.86), Bangkok (4.25/3.82) and Phuket (4.536/3.64).
- *Support (2)* was found in Thailand (4.24/3.82), Bangkok (4.24/3.77), Chiang Mai (4.79/4.13) and Pattaya (4.20/3.65).
- *Awareness (5)* was found in Thailand (4.30/3.85), Bangkok (4.19/3.85), Chiang Mai (4.50/3.87), and Pattaya (4.30/3.75).
- *One-stop service (6)* was found in Thailand (4.32/3.91), Bangkok (4.21/3.91) and Pattaya (4.30/3.85).
- *Networking / Communication (7)* was found in Khon Kaen only (4.50/4.10).
- *Workflow (12)* only found in Khon Kaen (4.50/4.10) and *Availability (15)* was found in Chiang Mai only (4.47/4.08).
- *Risk management (16)* was found in Thailand (4.35/3.95), Bangkok (4.27/3.86), and Khon Kaen (4.43/4.03)
- *Risk prevention (17)* was found in this quadrant for Thailand (4.38/3.94), Bangkok (4.50/3.90), Chiang Mai (4.50/4.11), Khon Kaen (4.23/3.96) and Pattaya (4.35/3.95).
- *Training courses (18)* was found for Thailand (4.31/3.99), Bangkok (4.29/3.95).

IV. Possible Overkill

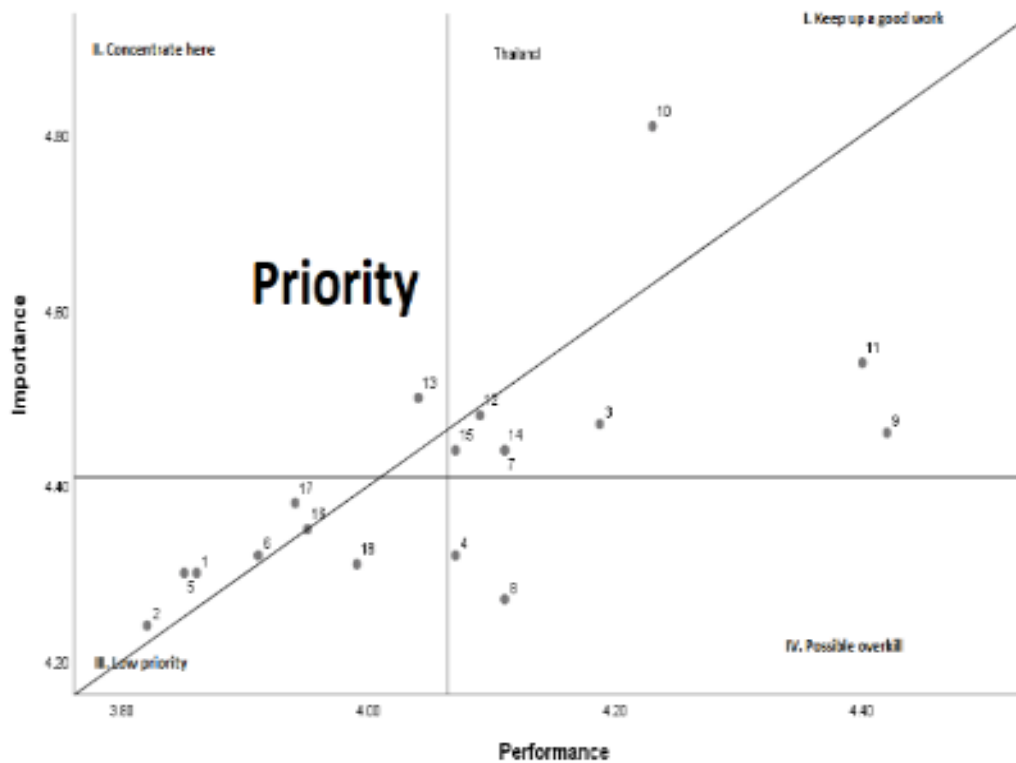
The attributes in this quadrant are those stakeholders consider unimportant, but where performance is high. None of the attributes in this quadrant referred to Phuket.

- The only factor for Thailand overall in this quadrant was *Symbols (4)* (importance mean score 4.32/performance mean score 4.07), which was also found in Bangkok (4.19/4.02) and Khon Kaen (4.50/4.26), and *Policy (8)* (4.27/4.11), which was also found in Bangkok (4.24/4.10)
- *Experience (13)* found in Phuket (3.82/4.41), *Foreign languages (14)* was found in Phuket (3.95/4.37) and Chiang Mai (4.55/4.29)
- *Workflow (12) and Training course (18)* only found in Chiang Mai (workflow importance mean score 4.55/performance mean score 4.21),

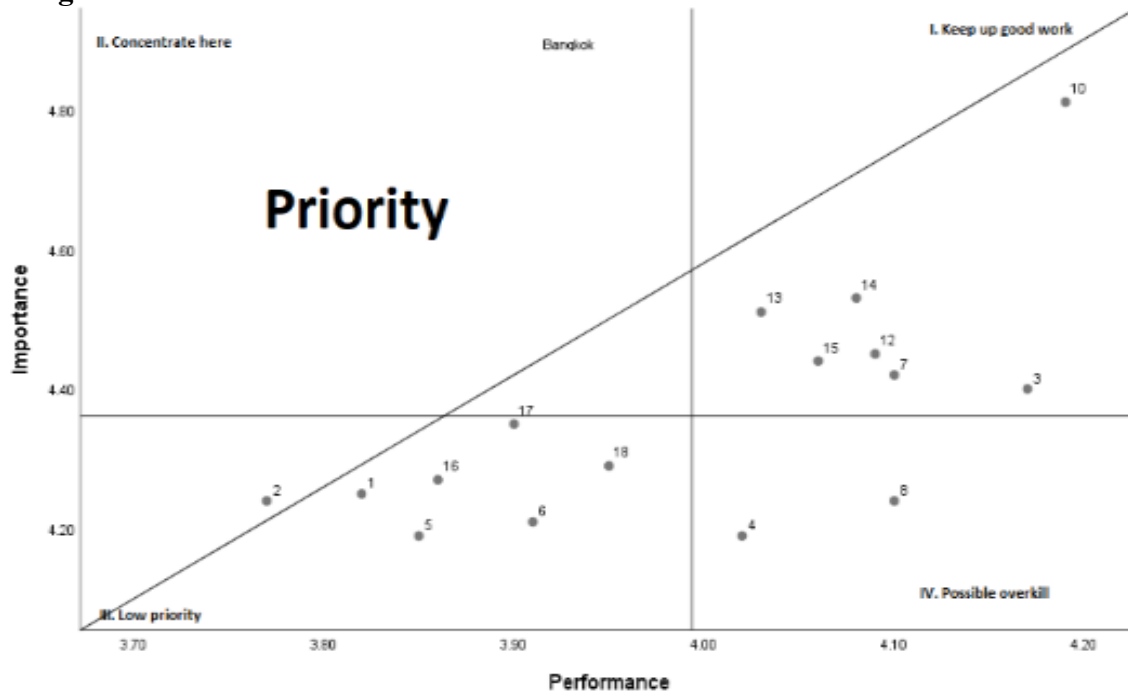
(Training course importance mean score 4.47/performance mean score 4.18).

Fig 7.2 IPA graphs

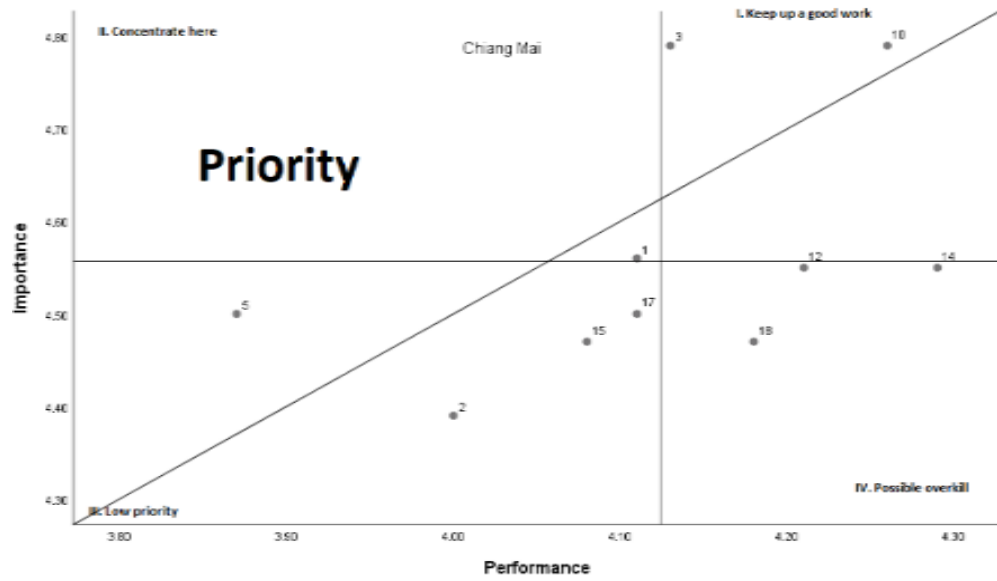
Thailand



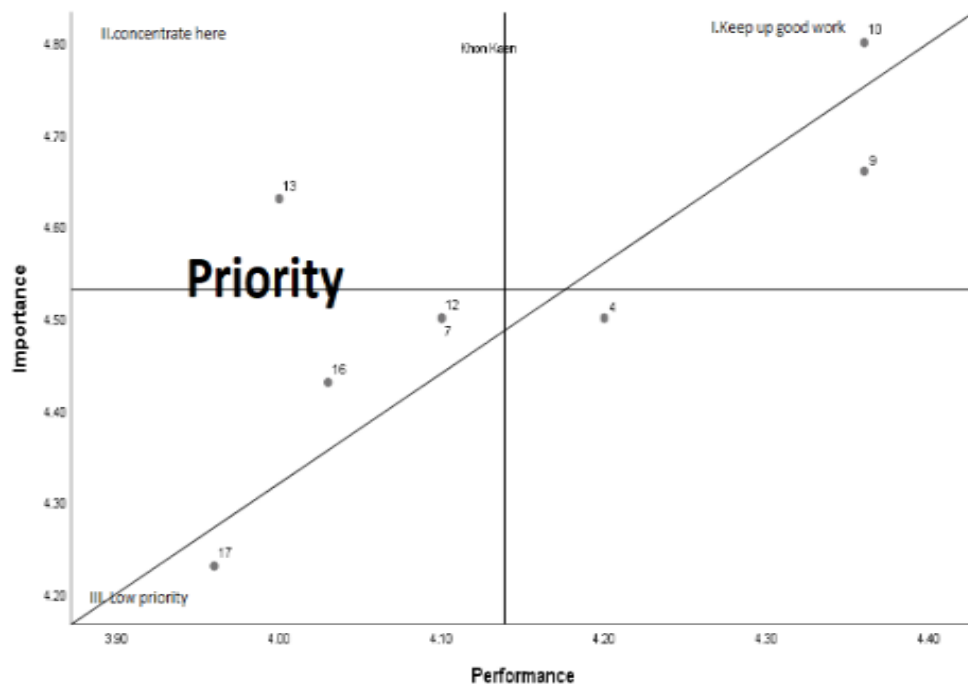
Bangkok



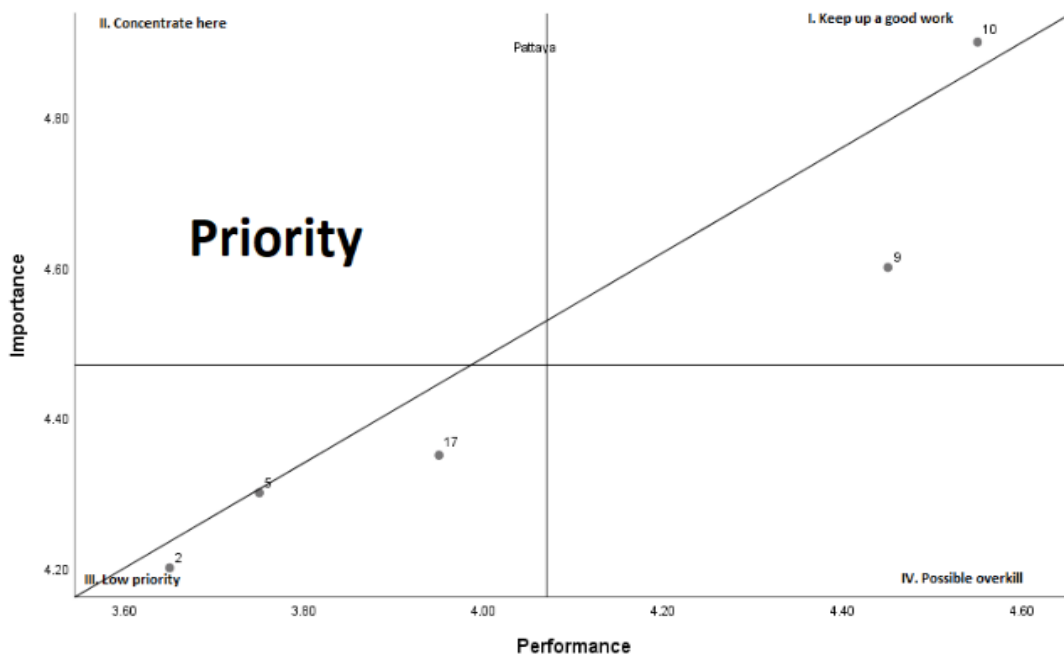
Chiang Mai



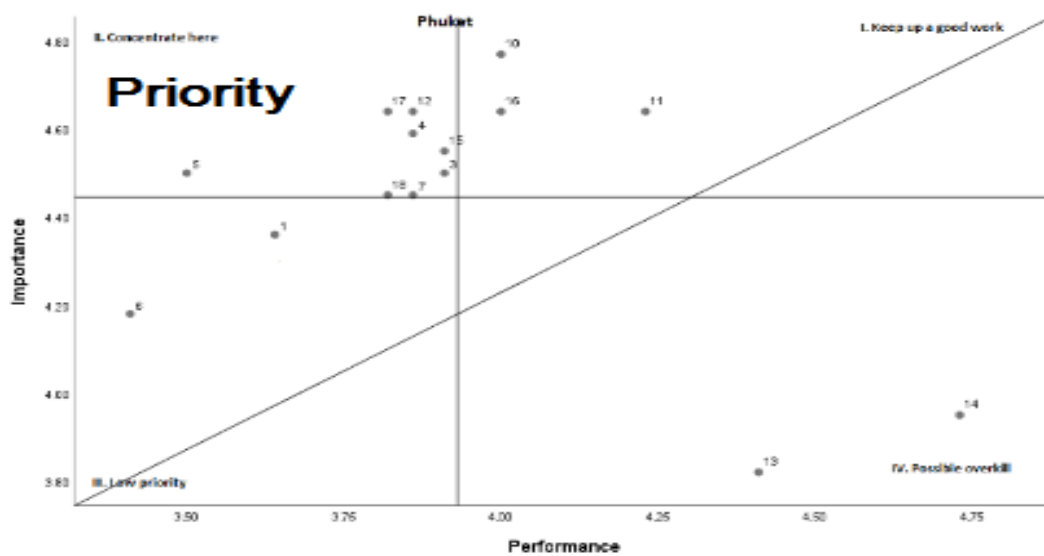
Khon Kaen



Pattaya



Phuket



Bidding(1), Support (2), Presentation (3), Symbols (4), Awareness(5), One-stop service(6), Networking/Communication (7), Policies (8), Venues (9), Transport (10), Technology (11), Workflow (12), Experience (13), Foreign Languages (14), Availability (15), Risk management (16), Risk prevention (17), Training courses (18), Tourist attractions (19), Reputation (20), Annual events (21)

7.8 Priorities for each MICE city in Thailand

This section has demonstrated the performance of individual MICE cities in Thailand. The findings attempted to address the current research aims, by assessing each MICE city's performance and what each needs to improve. Table 7.12 presents the prioritised factors that need to improve, from the perspective of stakeholders in the MICE industry. The IPA techniques were applied to identify the set of priority factors by employing both the cross-hair graph and diagonal line. The results provided priority factors in the upper left quadrant, but the use of the diagonal line allows factors to also be considered even if they are in the 'lower priority' sector, because their performance is not necessarily in line with importance. The factors plotted on the graph above were those that demonstrated mean differences between importance and performance values. The IPA graphs in the previous chapter also presented priority factors in MICE cities as well as the whole of Thailand. Transportation was found as a priority factor for Thailand as a whole and for all the cities except Bangkok. *Awareness* has found as a priority for Thailand, Phuket and Chiang Mai. The *Bidding process* and *Risk prevention* are considered priorities for Thailand overall, and Phuket. Similarly, *Risk Management*, *Networking/Community*, and *Workflow* were considered priority factors for Phuket and Khon Kaen. Being more *Supportive* is a priority factor for Thailand and Bangkok, as was *Experience* (Thailand and Khon Kaen), and *Presentation* (Phuket and Chiang Mai). Finally, there are priorities for one city only, namely *Symbol*, *Technology*, *Availability* and *Training courses* only found as a priority factor for Phuket.

The remaining nine factors were not considered priorities, but they need to be attended to nevertheless in order to develop benchmarking for MICE cities in the context of Thailand, as discussed in Chapter 8.

7.9 Conclusion

This chapter presented the quantitative findings from the second phase of the research, which involved the online questionnaire survey of 266 key stakeholders in the Thai MICE industry.

First, the profiles of respondents were given and demographics such as work status, duration of business, target groups and information about the events that they operate. In order to interpret the IPA results, paired-sample t-tests were

used to measure the gaps between importance and performance. The results were plotted into an IPA grid. Finally, these results were interpreted in terms of each attribute's performance, and these were then prioritized according in terms of both Thailand as a whole and each individual MICE city. The results can be found in Table 7.10 below.

Table 7.10 Priority factors that need to be improved

| Attribute | Factor | Thailand | Phuket | Khon Kaen | Bangkok | Chiang Mai | Pattaya |
|-----------|------------------------------|----------|--------|-----------|---------|------------|---------|
| 10 | Transportation | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |
| 5 | Awareness | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | |
| 1 | Bidding Process | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| 17 | Risk Prevention | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| 16 | Risk Management | | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| 2 | Supportive | ✓ | | | ✓ | | |
| 3 | Good represent | | ✓ | | | ✓ | |
| 13 | Experience | ✓ | | ✓ | | | |
| 7 | Networking and communication | | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| 12 | Workflow | | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| 6 | One-stop Service | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| 4 | Symbol | | ✓ | | | | |
| 11 | Technology | | ✓ | | | | |
| 14 | Foreign language | | | | | | |
| 15 | Availability | | ✓ | | | | |
| 18 | Training courses | | ✓ | | | | |
| 19 | Tourist attraction | | | | | | |
| 20 | The reputation of the city | | | | | | |
| 21 | Annual events | | | | | | |
| 8 | Policies | | | | | | |
| 9 | Venue | | | | | | |

Chapter 8. Research findings and Discussion

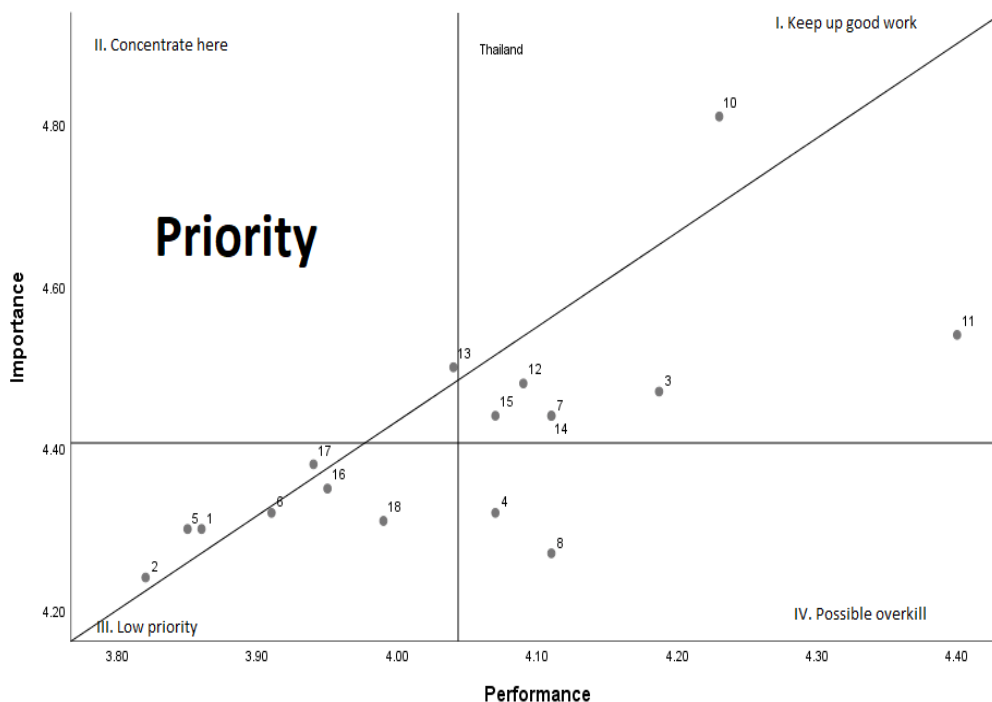
8.1 Introduction

The previous chapter reported the results of the IPA, from which it can be seen what the most important factors are for each MICE city. These findings will help stakeholders in the MICE sector look at the gaps between the importance and performance of each factor, and identify which are the critical issues that need to be the focus. However, addressing these problems requires discussion. This chapter attempts to provide more detail about each factor by combining the findings from phase 1 (Chapter 6) with the IPA graphs (Chapter 7). An overview of the study will be given, further exploring the characteristics of a MICE city using the qualitative findings from Chapter 6. The results in this chapter will be related to the research questions and research aims, with the study's findings regarding the most critical factors of MICE destination development. Each factor is described using the rich, detailed testimonies provided by research participants. Finally, the chapter assesses the relevance and usefulness of destination benchmarking tool for event planning and destination choice and summarises the results.

The research adopted the BESTBET framework as the basis for a destination benchmarking tool for event planning and destination choice (as explained in Chapter 4). The overarching aim was to explore the international and cross-cultural replicability of such a model and, in doing so, determine any additional factors that may arise, or indeed factors that may be redundant in a different cultural setting. As discussed, the research took place in Thailand, providing a sufficiently culturally distinct context to achieve the aforementioned research aim. The research used qualitative data to gain a better understanding of the MICE industry and MICE destinations from the stakeholders' perspectives, and consequently to investigate the application of destination benchmarking in MICE destinations. Following this, the study undertook quantitative research to test the factors that emerged from the qualitative phase, alongside those already identified in the BESTBET framework. Consequently, this chapter presents the combined results of both phases one and two of this

study and offers a framework of various categories and components along with detailed explanations of how they connect to development, helping to reveal the dynamic complexity of developing MICE destinations to ensure the prosperity of individual stakeholders and society.

Fig 8.1 Prioritizing the improvement of destinations in Thailand



Bidding(1), Support (2), Presentation (3), Symbols (4), Awareness(5), One-stop service(6), Networking/Communication (7), Policies (8), Venues (9), Transport (10), Technology (11), Workflow (12), Experience (13), Foreign Languages (14), Availability (15), Risk management (16), Risk prevention (17), Training courses (18), Tourist attractions (19), Reputation (20), Annual events (21)

8.2 Priority factors for developing MICE destinations

This section identifies a set of factors found in the priority area shown in Figure 8.1, following the IPA techniques discussed in Chapter 7. As described previously the study employed both the means cross-hair graph and the diagonal line (Rial et al., 2008). In addition to the quadrants the diagonal line helps to identify discrepancies of the attributes which can be considered as indicators for prioritizing the improvement of products and services. Whilst Figure 8.1 seems to show limited factors in the upper left quadrant, the use of the diagonal line allows factors to still be considered even if they are in the ‘lower priority’ sector, because the performance is not necessarily in line with respective importance.

The factors plotted on the graph above were those that demonstrated mean differences between importance and performance values. The IPA graphs in the previous chapter also presented priority factors in MICE cities as well as the whole of Thailand. Figure 8.1 shows six factors found in the priority area above the line. All six factors identified for Thailand as a whole were from the BESTBET framework: *Bidding*, *Support*, *Awareness*, *Transportation*, *Experience* and *Risk prevention*. In addition, the factor that was found as a priority issue for most of the MICE cities is *Transportation*, which was identified as an issue for the whole country except Bangkok. *Bidding* was found as a priority in Phuket and *Support* in Bangkok, Chiang Mai, and Pattaya. *Experience* was found as a priority for Khon Kaen and *awareness among local people* in Thailand as a whole, Phuket and Chiang Mai. The last factor that need attention as it was found in an overall priority area is *Risk prevention*, for both Thailand as a whole and Phuket in particular.

Outside the national picture, *risk management* was also found to be relevant in Phuket, Bangkok and Khon Kaen. *Good presentation as a MICE city* was found as a priority factor for Phuket. Phuket also indentified *Networking and Communication*, *Workflow*, *Symbol*, *Good presentation*, and *Availability of workers* to be priorities. There were four factors only found in Phuket as a priorities: *Symbol*, *Technology*, *Availability*, and *Training courses*. The following section examines the IPA outcomes for each destination using the quadrant based analysis for structure, combining both the quantitative and qualitative insights. However, as noted, elements that are placed above the diagonal line are still considered as requiring attention, even if they are placed in lower priority sectors.

I. Keep up the good work

The 'Keep up good work' area presents attributes that demonstrate high importance and high performance. Attributes failing within this quadrant are indicative of a destination's success in meeting visitors' standards of performance in areas that the respondents deem relevant. In the context of this study, eight attributes were considered to be of high importance and high performance.

8.2.1 Transport (10)

In tourism, especially at an international level, transport plays a major role in determining the success of the industry (Lau, 2016). Numerous studies have found transport and/or accessibility to be vital in MICE areas (DiPietro et al., 2008; Huang, 2016; Whitfield and Dioko, 2014; Haven-Tang et al., 2007; Elston and Draper, 2012; Wu and Weber, 2005; Fawzy, 2008; Louviere and One, 2004). Predictably, transport was mentioned many times as a priority for developing MICE destinations in the current study. In the context of this study, transport refers to an entire transport system, including airlines (international and domestic), local transport and the traffic system. As confirmed in both Chapters 6 and 7, transport in MICE cities is a priority. However, Figure 8.1 shows that currently good performance is being achieved here (mean importance is 4.81 and mean performance scores is 4.23), as this appeared in the 'keep up the good work' quadrant.

Transportation is the main factor for the MICE city, including some flights, supported by the road transport system, and this is also the main reason for the attendant [failing to] attend an event. However, I think most of the MICE cities now doing well as now are providing convenient accessibility.

(Event planner, Phuket)

The main reason that I consider Bangkok as the best MICE city in Thailand is because of the location as the city is the main hub and gateway to the South East Asian region with full capacity and international flights accessibility from all over the world. Therefore, transportation is a main thing that need to be focused on [and] the transportation system in Bangkok is very good.

(Event planner, Bangkok)

Apparently, all the cities that [have] been selected to promote as MICE cities have a good transportation system and international airport. Well, Pattaya is not far from Suvanaphum airport. So I am agreed that

accessibility is the main important thing that needs to be considered.
(Government/Trade Associations, Phuket)

Local transportation in a MICE city could include local buses, taxis and motorbikes. Some participants felt that Thailand is more appropriate for domestic business travellers than international travellers. The starting point should be travel options within the country, as some participants were concerned about issues such as traffic jams (which are a major problem in MICE cities), the lack of standard pricing in local transportation, and the lack of punctuality of public transportation.

The traffic in Bangkok is extremely mad, and the transport system in Bangkok has been relying on a poorly-planned road network. Roads are insufficient relative to the city size and population. This problem is an emergency and needs to be solved. I do not know how to solve the problem, but it needs to be done as many times Bangkok customer has complained and did not want to come to Bangkok because of the traffic.
(Event planner, Bangkok)

I will say not all MICE city could host an international event because of several reasons even the government invested a lot to improve air transportation, but it seems like we have more problems in local transportation such as traffic, the standard of service and the prices.
(Event planner, Bangkok)

Many times, the guests complain about public transport as the airport is far away from the city and the taxi is very expensive, especially at peak times. The price of the taxi from the airport to the hotel is more expensive than the air ticket. So, I think local public transport is a serious issue.
(Event planner, Phuket)

Even though Pattaya has no airport, it is very close to the biggest airport in the country, so transport is fine. However, I think it will be better if we could improve the standard of the local bus: maybe a friendly price and also stricter motorbike rules.
(Government/Trade Associations, Phuket)

Khon Kaen is a newborn and still needs to improve many things in order to become an international MICE destination. For example, the airport is not an international airport yet, so people still need to stop in Bangkok before coming to Khon Kaen. However, I can tell that the city has been improved very fast as we are a smart city with smart transportation or smart buses.
(Event planner, Khon Kaen)

These comments specified that in order to develop as a MICE destination, transport is a priority issue: not only air transport, but the whole system. The

reflections from stakeholders are supported by the literature review in Chapter 2. For example, Tuming, Chaigasem and Siriwong (2019) found that developing the logistic and transport system in Khon Kaen could benefit the city as a MICE city. Further, Hanaoka (2007) suggests that a public transport-oriented policy and restrictions on private vehicles need to be applied to Bangkok, as well as dealing with the inflation rate and poor public transport. Even though transportation was not found as a priority in Bangkok, as a capital city Bangkok could be a role model of developing a transport system for other MICE cities. Transportation was found to be high performance and of high importance in Thailand as a whole, especially in Bangkok and Phuket.

8.2.2 Good presentation and good representation/Promotion of the city as a MICE city (3)

This factor is derived from the BESTBET framework and has been found to be a priority for Thailand as a whole, Bangkok, and Chiang Mai in the IPA analysis (Chapter 7) (mean importance is 4.81 and mean performance scores is 4.23). The study found that to develop a MICE city, a good representation of a city as a MICE city or brand is required. Chapter 4 presents the concept of destination branding as a marketing activity, and notes it as the responsibility of the DMO. This can be seen as a set of associations linked to particular destinations and venues that lodge in visitors' memories that help to differentiate destinations from one another (Williams et al., 2011). Lehto and Morrison (2007) agree that a destination's image is an integral and influential part of the traveller's decision-making process and consequent travel behaviours. Therefore, many places around the world have invested considerable sums of money in destination branding campaigns. This was found to be important, especially in Phuket and Chiang Mai. A few participants commented here:

TCEB and stakeholders in our city work very hard in promoting the city as a MICE city which is important. Chiang Mai is a well know destination but not because of it is a MICE city yet. So, presenting the city as a MICE city should help to send a message to the MICE traveller. (Event planner, Chiang Mai)

Thailand is famous for people all over the world for many reasons. However, if the country wanted to be well-known as a MICE country, I think we need to position ourselves and present our country, especially Bangkok as a MICE city. Therefore, travellers would know we have capability to welcome any sort of MICE activities.

(Event planner, Bangkok)

Thailand is of course popular for leisure travellers but I don't really think we are accepted as a MICE destination just yet. Therefore, it our job to work out how to present the country as a MICE city. I am sure we are getting there as TCEB and the government are creating many campaigns to promote the country to attract the MICE group.

(Event planner, Bangkok)

The comments above reflect that the country needs to put more effort into promoting and presenting the country and cities as MICE destinations. In a Thai context, these marketing activities are mostly done by TCEB for the whole country and individual MICE cities. Bensi et al. (2016) state that the CVBs of a destination have a responsibility to provide a marketing plan to attract significant events, as well as offering a plan of events, city tours, and social activities, transport solutions, welcome receptions for delegates, etc.

8.2.3 Networking and Communication (7)

Networking and Communication were found to be a priority for Thailand as a whole (mean importance mean score 4.44; performance mean score 4.11) and Bangkok (mean importance score 4.42; performance mean score 4.10). in the 'keep it up' quadrant. Networking and communication in the study refers to being in contact with stakeholders in the city (see Chapter 2). Rogers (2006) suggests that collaboration and partnership are fundamental to success in developing a MICE destination. Likewise, a majority of participants from Khon Kaen observed that there is still difficulty working together as a team. Choi, Lehto and Morrison (2007) indicate that, typically, the management of a team is organized by DMOs and CVBs under a common umbrella, offering leadership for the local community and providing assistance with a greater sense of coherence within the destination.

The TCEB been very helpful in almost every way of promoting Khon Kaen as a MICE city. However, I think we should also be able to help ourselves to improve our city as a team. So, I think we should talk to each other more and work together more.

(Event planner, Khon Kaen)

Any information as well as a marketing strategy from TCEB are very helpful but we as a local stakeholder still need to work together to achieve the aim and being success[ful] in promoting Khon Kaen as a MICE city.

(Travel agency, Khon Kaen)

I don't know who the stakeholders are in the MICE section in Khon Kaen to be honest as we are too busy focusing on our own business, but would be nice if we knew each other more or maybe work together at some point.

(Event planner, Khon Kaen)

These comments highlight that networking in Khon Kaen has been ignored and should be considered in order to develop as a MICE city. Networking or cooperating among the team might support the success of the destination (Yodsuwan, 2009). However, networking was only found as a priority critical success factor in Khon Kaen. This might be because Khon Kaen may not yet compete with the other MICE cities, and thus opportunities to work together might be limited. On the other hand, some participants felt that networking or sharing resources might be a bad idea:

I still [do] not believe in running business in a friendly way as Thai culture and Thai people are not really open, and it could be worst that they pretended to be friendly [...]. So I am not sure if work as a team in the context of business would be a good idea.

(Spa, Chiang Mai)

There are too many people in the industry so that it might be a hard job to co-work and we all focusing on making money more than making friends I suppose.

(Hotel, Pattaya)

I think most companies in Phuket are very good at what they do and they are strong enough with their resources and their own connections. So, I don't know if they are interested to link and work as a team or even become members of TCEB.

(Government/Trade Associations, Phuket)

These comments suggest that networking could provide advantages and disadvantages for practitioners as they are also competitors. Getz and Jamal (1995) and Reed (2000) suggest that conflict among stakeholders is often a result of the complex interaction of issues, such as differing values, perceptions, agendas, and interests. Yuksel and Yuksel (2003) and Bornhors et al. (2010b) suggest that, in collaboration, the respective roles of stakeholders become a logical precursor to such outcomes. A tourism destination can be better managed and developed through stakeholder collaboration.

8.2.4 Workflow and collaboration of workers in the MICE industry (12)

Similar to the Networking and Communication factor, Workflow and Collaboration was only found to be important to Thailand as a whole and Bangkok (importance mean score 4.48 and performance mean score 4.09) and (importance mean score 4.45 and performance mean score 4.09).

Chapter 2 illustrated the nature and complexity of the tourism industry and the stakeholders involved in it. Planning events involves interaction and collaboration between stakeholders, and resource dependence theory has validated the importance of interdependence between suppliers and external environment in an open system (Pfeffer, 1982; Huang, 2016). Resources are exchanged among individual organizations, as individual organizations cannot fully meet all the needs in a given process (Lambe & Spekman, 1997). Therefore, collaboration among stakeholders is considered a valuable management tool for tourism destinations (Yodsuwan, 2009b). Huang (2016) suggests that hosting an event in the MICE sector involves many aspects of various fields. Thus, workers need to cooperate in the work processes between the key stakeholders and related service providers, as well as communicating with residents and clients in providing information about products and services if they wish to develop a MICE city in a Thai context. The prevailing point of view of regarding workflow in the MICE industry is that the skills of workers in the industry are needed to support each other in the industry. Workers need a particular spirit and mindset in order to co-operate with local suppliers.

Because most of the suppliers in the MICE industry in Khon Kaen know each other and accepted the roles that they have in specific areas, we could easily contact them if we need something that we could not handle it ourselves. People who work together need to open their minds and agree that you cannot work alone.

(Event planner, Khon Kaen)

If people who work in the industry realized that working as a team is better than being alone, that would help to improve [things] [...]. In Phuket, we still lack communication among the suppliers [...] [there] is a diversity of tourism suppliers and the spread of consumers throughout the world. Therefore, it seems difficult for an individual business to communicate and collaborate.

(Event planner, Phuket)

Most of the companies in the city are very good at what they do. However, as policy-makers [...] we try to support them as much as we

can [...]. I think even if they are excellent in running their business, to make it flow smooth collaboration is something that we should consider. (Government/Trade Associations, Phuket)

I am sure that our city has a high potential of growth as a MICE city as we have a strong team and network. Most stakeholders are not only in the business sector but also include academic and non-profit associations, as well as residents. This could help [make] the working process smooth and quick as we have agreed on the same aim to develop our city to be a strong MICE city. (Hotel, Khon Kaen)

Fig 8.1 shows that only in Khon Kaen (performance mean score 4.50; performance mean score 4.10) was the workflow factor found as a low priority. On the other hand, Phuket (performance mean score 4.64; performance mean score 3.86) were concerned about workflow and collaboration in a MICE city, appearing in the ‘concentrate here’ quadrant. This may be because understanding of the importance of teamwork among stakeholders is incomplete. For example, Uansa-ard and Binprathan (2018) observe that those working in the MICE sector have limited knowledge of the basic needs and restrictions of Muslim clients, and thus cannot provide proper products and services. The researchers go on suggest promoting Chiang Mai as a MICE destination, for which communication and coordination among local suppliers, together with principals and residents, is required. Yodsuwan (2009) also found that even though tourism collaboration in the North of Thailand has been promoted heavily, it is not yet successful because the private sector did not take it seriously. Sirirassamee (2005) agreed that policies are necessary in the success of developing the MICE industry in Thailand, such as those that might support the bidding process for an international event. Sharing and transferring information from one place to another will benefit locals as well as providing new knowledge to stakeholders. The findings from the current study confirm that to successfully develop a MICE destination, workflow needs to be considered, which requires more consideration of local collaboration and teamwork.

8.2.5 Availability of workers (15)

The availability and sufficiency of workers in the MICE industry was found to be a priority in ‘keep up the good work’ (importance mean score of 4.44; performance score of 4.07). This was also found in Bangkok (importance score 4.44; performance score 4.06). As Chapter 2 mentioned, the products and service required by the MICE traveller are different from those sought by the leisure traveller (David, 2000). A few participants has mentioned the limited number of workers who fully understand the MICE industry.

I know we have many people who work in hospitality and tourism but working in the MICE industry is different. We will need people who understand the nature of MICE and MICE travellers need. I know that some university has now started to teach in MICE or event subjects which will be very good in future.

(Event planner, Phuket)

I have some students working with me as a trainee and I will probably offer them a job after they graduate. As we have been training them and they understand MICE industry and how to work with MICE traveller with require more skills than working in a tourism industry.

(Event planner, Phuket)

I have been working in a hotel for more than 15 years now but I am still new in the MICE industry. Our hotel now getting ready to promote more on conventions and functions. I need to learn a lot more about MICE and practice more skills such as planning and event or conference for MICE group which has more details than usual.

(Hotel, Chiang Mai)

The availability and sufficiency of workers in the MICE industry was also found to be an important factor in other study. Royal and Jago (2011) identified that planning and organisational knowledge was very important to the profession. Similarly, Arcodia and Barker (2002) found that an event manager job required special skills such as organisation, being able to plan and co-ordinate, multitasking, and computer knowledge and skill. The comments clearly show that the availability and sufficiency of worker in MICE industry is important. However, this factor was located in the “keep it up” area of Figure 8.1, presumably because the participants agreed that workers who work in the MICE industry meet a standard of service. However, the need to improve the skills of workers is still there.

8.2.6 Technology (11)

Technology was found as a ‘keep up the good work’ factor in Thailand as a whole (means importance score 4.54; performance mean score 4.36) and in Phuket (importance mean score 4.64; performance mean score 4.23). Phuket is on a popular island and people who travel there are from all over the world. As two participants observed,

Phuket is full of traveller[s] from all over the world and the reason why I think technology is important, [e]specially internet speed because the people who come to the island will need internet to work or even contact their family. Very often my clients asked me if Phuket has problems about internet.

(Event planners, Phuket)

Every single time before the meeting or conference start we will provide a wi-fi password for an attendee or they will ask even before its event start. From my observation MICE traveller will consider the technology as an important more than leisure traveller, which not really surprise as they will have to work even when they are away from their workplace and their country.

(Event planners, Phuket)

These comments support the IPA result that suggests when promoting a MICE city, technology, especially internet access, needs to be considered. This is because the MICE traveller requires more specific products and services than the leisure group (Davidson, 2000). Swarbrook and Horner (2001) state the specific products and services that MICE travellers require, including audio-visual specialists and information technology facilities..

8.2.7 Foreign Languages (14)

Foreign languages were found as a priority factor that should be considered in developing a MICE city in the whole of Thailand (importance mean score 4.44; performance mean score 4.11). The factor was also found as high importance and high performance in Bangkok (importance means score 4.53 and performance mean score 4.08). Foreign languages refers to languages other than Thai (not only English) and are one of the skills required of workers in the MICE industry. Some participants observed that those working in tourism have a basic knowledge of English. However, other languages are also important.

The MICE industry covers more than just English speakers but much more than that, for example Chinese now become a bigger market for our company. So now we have to know Chinese. So, I would say English language should be already our second language and we need to know more than English.

(Event planner, Bangkok)

Language is the main important thing that we need when doing business and contacting with others. As nowadays a world is getting smaller so foreign languages are extremely important.

(Travel agency, Chiang Mai)

These views support those of Roger (2007), who states that the skills required in business and tourism in the UK includes the ability to speak foreign languages. Similarly, Kuo, Chen and Lin (2010) found good command of languages and the right attitude are the most critical elements in customer satisfaction for international conferences in Taiwan. Interestingly, skill in foreign languages was considered as an area of possible overkill in Chiang Mai (importance means score 4.55; performance mean score 4.21) and Phuket (importance means score 4.41; performance mean score 3.82). One participant observed,

We now have few people who know different languages such as Russian, Chinese and Indian. The reason [is] because our clients are from all over the world and some country they preferred their own language.

(Event planner, Phuket)

These findings on the language factors have confirmed that the factor is one of the important factors that is needed in developing a MICE city.

8.2.8 Venue (9)

This factor was found in the high importance and high performance quadrant for Thailand as a whole (importance mean score 4.46; performance mean score 4.42), Pattaya (importance mean score 4.60; performance mean score 4.45) and Khon Kaen (importance means score 4.66; performance mean score 4.36). A suitable venue is one of the basic elements that a MICE city needs to offer. A number of previous studies found venues to be one of the most important elements that influencing site selection (e.g. Chen and Mo, 2012; Haven-Tang et al., 2007; Crouch and Ritchie, 1997; Whitfield et al., 2014). There is a reason

why venues are considered important in Khon Kaen and Pattaya. Some participants highlight this:

I am so glad that finally we have an international venue that could hold a big event and exhibition. As I used to question that if Khon Kaen could be really a MICE city as we used to have only one venue which in Khon Kaen university. But now we have KICE so now I can proudly say that Khon Kaen is a MICE city.

(Event planner, Khon Kaen)

There is no doubt why Pattaya has been selected to be a MICE city because we have everything the MICE traveller needed. For example, we have a venue which is big enough for an international event, and we also have hotels that could hold a big meeting and conference.

(Hotel, Pattaya)

The comments from participants supported the findings from quantitative and qualitative results of the study as well as the literature, that suitable venues are a priority factor for developing MICE cities.

II. Concentrate here

This quadrant is the most critical categorisation because it determines the areas in which the firm or destination fails to satisfy the customers' perceived level of performance in areas they judge as salient. Underperformance on these attributes requires immediate attention and the highest prioritisation in terms of resources and effort. Only one attribute was found in this quadrant, as discussed below.

8.2.9 Experience (13)

This factor was been found to be important, but with low performance (importance mean score 4.50; performance mean score 4.04) in Thailand as a whole and Khon Kaen (importance mean score 4.63; performance mean score 4.00). The MICE industry is one of the fastest developing areas in the world (WTO, 2014). Many destinations have transformed themselves to diversify and gain a competitive advantage within the MICE industry (WTO, 2014). Consequently, there is high competition among MICE destinations. Due to established and emerging markets, the human resources, management and service quality need to be the focus in order to remain competitive (Weber & Ladkin, 2003). Haven-Tang et al. (2006) suggest that underpinning high-quality

products and services appropriate skills with experienced workers is a priority in developing business tourism destinations.

Likewise, Thailand has been investing and promoting the country to attract the MICE travellers. However, as Chapter 2 mentioned, the MICE industry has emerged in Thailand only in the last ten years. The results from the study found a remarkable lack of specialization, which is unsurprising since that MICE industry is still new for Thailand and Thai people. There is high demand for employees with experience and specific skills and knowledge, particularly in senior roles. Experience was found as a priority issue that need to be concentrated on in Khon Kaen. A few participants observed that:

The MICE industry has been proliferating rapidly and no wonder we still need some more time to learn and gain more experience. I think the MICE industry is pretty new for everyone so now we are in the [learning] process.

(Khon Kaen, Hotel)

As we now focus more on MICE groups more than leisure travellers, but we are still struggling [with the complications of] planning an event and facilitating the business traveller group. There are some particular products and services that required for the MICE group, for example, we are not good at preparing for the bidding process comparing with a bigger company who has more experience and more capacity.

(Event planner, Khon Kaen)

Most of the time we will hear that people assumed that people who work in tourism and hospitality need to speak more than one language. I don't agree because I think the most important thing is knowledge. Since I have been managing the venue for few years now, the most difficult thing I found is staff don't understand their responsibility. In fact, they lack knowledge and this needs to be immediately improved.

(Venue, Khon Kaen)

Other cities have not found the experience of workers to be a priority. Some respondents pointed out a possible reason for this:

Pattaya is the closest city to Bangkok, and most of the event planners are from the capital city as they have more experience and more capability. This could be why many local event planners have not much opportunity to plan a huge or an international event, as there are not many local companies who have the skills.

(Government/Trade Associations, Pattaya)

We have had experience hosting an international event, but the main organizer company is from Bangkok because they have more experience and excellent performance. We were a co-organizer, and I think this is

an excellent opportunity to learn from a better company, as there are many things and also skills that local compan[ies] like us need to improve. (Government/Trade Associations, Chiang Mai)

These two comments reflected a perception that event planners from Bangkok have more potential and ability than those from a local company. Oppermann (1996) suggests that meeting planners with experience are perceived as better at their jobs. The findings suggest that experience is one of the most important factors to improve the MICE industry in the Thai context.

III. Low priority

Attributes falling in this category do not embody an immediate competitive threat and may be minor weaknesses. They are likely to be low priority in the rationing of scarce resources by decision-makers. If no gains can be achieved, extra effort in this area is unnecessary. However, low priority does not mean that there should be no attention paid to these things at all. Seven low-priority attributes were identified for Thailand (see Fig 8.1), as discussed below.

8.2.10 Bidding Process (1)

The bidding process was considered a critical issue but in a low priority that needs to improve in Thailand as a whole (mean importance score 4.30; performance score 3.86), Bangkok (mean importance score 4.25; mean performance score 3.82), and Phuket (mean importance score 4.36; mean performance score 3.64). From the qualitative findings, it is clear that this is because most participants have never participated in a bidding process, commenting that most event planners are from Bangkok, even if the event takes place elsewhere.

Many times, when we have an international event, the event planners are from Bangkok [...]. Therefore, maybe more opportunity to participant a bidding process could help a local event planner.
(Event planner, Phuket)

As we know wining the bidding is not easy but it would be really good to learn how to prepare an information in the process of bidding, as we [have] not really had a chance to participate in a bidding process.
(Event planner, Phuket)

Most of the time event planners are from Bangkok so we as a local business [do] not really have an opportunity to arrange a huge event.

However, if [we had support] we could at least try to win the bidding process and prove that we are good enough.
(Travel agency, Pattaya)

The comments from phase 1 reflected that bidding is considered an important factor in developing MICE cities and also improving the skills of workers in the industry. The results from qualitative and the quantitative data in phase 2 its relative importance is deemed to be related. However, bidding was not found to be a priority to improve in Khon Kaen and Pattaya. This may be because local stakeholders have not experienced a bidding process.

I do not think [a] bidding process is an actual process because I believe the customer will do research themselves and have already picked a name of the event planner. Therefore, the event planner's performance or their experience is maybe more important than bidding.
(Event planner, Pattaya)

We as a local event planner have no experience about a bidding process as we never have a chance to join the bidding process. Even when the events happen in Khon Kaen, the event planners are always from Bangkok, and of course, they are a bigger company with greater experience and better performance.
(Event planner, Khon Kaen)

I think we have not much chance to learn about the bidding process yet, as the city is more like a destination for local and domestic than international events. Therefore, bidding is still be something new for us.
(Event planner, Khon Kaen)

It is something challenging. We still need to learn more and also need more staff who have experience and know about the bidding and how to prepare for the bidding.
(Event planner, Bangkok)

Winning a bid for an international event is tough and very often that the company who win the huge event is a big company with a good performance and experienced staff.
(Event planner, Bangkok)

We have a few times participated in the bidding as we got an information from TCEB but of course we did not win. I think we still need to learn more and have more experience to win the bidding in the future.
(Event planner, Chiang Mai)

These comments clearly show that the respondents understand that the bidding process is an important priority. The factor was located in the low priority quadrant of Figure 8.1, presumably because many participants have never taken

part in a bidding process. It is noticeable that the participants are willing to learn and improved their bidding skills, as they understand its importance. Chapter 4 explained the bidding process is vital for event planners, and in Thailand the bidding process in the MICE industry is still neglected as not many people know how to create an appropriate strategy. There is also limited access to the relevant information despite the existence and efforts of the TCEB. Staff with knowledge, skills and experience of the bidding process are needed. The results found that not every company knew how to prepare a proposal, and most companies that win bids are often very large.

8.2.11 Supportive Leadership (2)

Support from leadership was been found as low priority and low performance in Thailand as a whole (importance mean score 4.24; performance mean score 3.82), Pattaya (importance mean score 4.20; performance mean score 3.65), Chiang Mai (importance mean score 4.39; performance mean score 4.00) and Bangkok (importance mean score 4.04; performance mean score 3.77).

As mentioned, the TCEB has been leading the MICE industry in Thailand. TCEB has always created ideas and strategies to develop the MICE industry and MICE cities, acting like a business connector, assisting new companies and encouraging the formation of strategic alliances throughout the region and globally. TCEB has established a standard and created training to improve the abilities of MICE industry professionals in Thailand. TCEB is the leading supporter of MICE industry development in Thailand with clear aims. This is why most stakeholders in the industry are happy to rely on TCEB as they have been supported in many ways. Unsurprisingly, leadership was found as a priority, but appears in a low priority area of Figure 8.1. Cooperation is also highly important, as most participants mentioned:

In order to successfully promote the MICE cities, support from both local government and trade association sectors are needed. Now, TCEB is a very important organization helping Pattaya to improve the city [...] for instance marketing strategies, policy, and even finance. I would say that we will do it without help from TCEB.
(Government/Trade Associations, Pattaya)

Private sector cooperation and promotion from TCEB are needed in order to succeed in promoting a MICE city. And the communication among the stakeholders most of the time has been managed by TCEB.

So, in developing the MICE industry and MICE city leadership or TCEB is very important but I think we as a local stakeholder should be able to work and create our own policy rather than rely on the TCEB.
(Travel agency, Khon Kaen)

Seriously support from TCEB and more regular promotions and activities is required in developing MICE cities.
(Government/Trade Associations, Phuket)

To develop and promote MICE cities, we need more support from the government such as financial and clear policy as well as training course to improve the skills of workers in the industry. Even now we are under the lead of TCEB but we still need more support such as a leader in the city. As I am not sure now who is the leader of MICE in Khon Kaen, I think this need to be clarified.
(Event planner, Khon Kaen)

Moreover, strong teamwork among different sections in the MICE and tourism industry should also support the sector.

We are lucky that we have excellent teamwork and the members of the team are from different parts of the MICE and tourism industry. This could be a benefit as we are sharing knowledge and experience to make Chiang Mai a great MICE city. However, we have still accepted guidelines and new information from TCEB, which is very important in order to keep up-to-date and develop our city.
(Government/Trade Associations, Chiang Mai)

We all understand and are aware that the MICE industry is growing and bring many benefits to the country and the city. This the reason why we as a local stakeholder are actively working forward on improving the MICE city rather than waiting for only TCEB to tell us what to do. However, of course, TCEB is still the main leader of Thailand and still a big supporter.
(Even planner, Chiang Mai)

To conclude, it seems like the main supporter of the MICE industry is TCEB, creating policy and marketing strategies as well as promoting MICE in Thailand and MICE cities. The form of support described in the current study includes information, finance, knowledge and skills of workers, and guidelines of management and operation systems for local government. Comments from participants show that local government has impacted on MICE city development and should always provide support to ensure the performance level of the MICE city as well as to enhance competitiveness.

8.2.12 Awareness (5)

Since the MICE sector is less seasonally sensitive, a destination can really benefit from tapping into the MICE industry. However, to create a strategy to promote a destination to the MICE traveller, awareness and understanding of the industry is essential (WTO, 2014). Awareness was found as a priority in Thailand (importance means score 4.30; performance mean score 3.85) and Bangkok (importance means score 4.19; performance mean score 3.85). but appeared in the low priority quadrant. This was also highlighted in Chiang Mai (importance mean score 4.57; performance mean score 3.87), and Pattaya (importance mean score 4.30; performance mean score 3.75). Thus, we can assume Thai people in general need to be more aware of the MICE industry and consider Thailand as a MICE destination. Some participants pointed out that local residents, government officials, businesses and employees are getting to understand the MICE industry and why it matters. However, many of these people still confuse leisure and MICE tourism.

The participants agreed that in order to enhance competition within the MICE industry, key stakeholders, related agencies and residents need an understanding and awareness of the industry so that they can cooperate:

First of all, an understating why MICE industry is important and how much [we could] benefit from the industry needs to be clear. To make people in the country realize and work toward to make it happen together. Moreover, I think this is the first thing that government or TCEB should do.

(Events planner, Bangkok)

From what I understand now is not many people aware of the MICE and why TCEB promoted MICE industry a lot. So, make people realise and aware of the advantages of MICE is still needed to improve. As well, good coordination and understanding the purpose of business and industry development MICE are in need.

(Events planner, Bangkok)

In order to develop the city to a good MICE city, policy-makers and related organizations in the city need to understand the campaign and set the same goal with the same activities to be ready as a MICE city. In fact, the stakeholders need to be aware what are they dealing with and how they should be working to achieve the goals.

(Events planner, Khon Kaen)

The city should focus more on publicity such as the availability of labels and other media of promoting MICE city, as I am not sure if locals could understand what MICE industry is and why we should focus on this.

TCEB and local government should put more effort to clarify and provide a clearer picture of the MICE city.
(Government/Trade Associations, Phuket)

An awareness of MICE city as can be presented in many ways, for example preparing to support both domestic and foreign meetings. Or understanding between people working together in the city based on the same policy and goals, building up an awareness will take time but would be great if people understand more about the MICE industry.
(Government/Trade Associations. Pattaya)

These comments demonstrate that improving the awareness of MICE destinations is considered critical to improve the quality of products and service for the MICE sector. Uansa-ard and Binprathan (2018) found that the majority of people who work in the industry, as well as other stakeholders, were not sufficiently aware of the MICE industry. The resulting lack of quality and standard of service is a major obstacle to MICE business, especially in the international market of Chiang Mai. The current study found that TCEB or other authorities were making an effort to educate people and make them aware of the benefits of the MICE industry. The destination's marketers need to understand their core competencies and where partnerships will help to strengthen their products or services (WTO, 2014). This factor was found to be a priority, but in a low priority quadrant.

8.2.13 One-stop service (6)

Chapter 2 explained that the MICE industry had involved many participants from various fields and that the MICE industry is a supplier, selling products and services to event planners (Kim and Qu, 2012; McCabe, 2008). To create the intention to buy a product or service in a destination, comprehensive information should be available. Hansen, (2004) suggests that information-related activities can influence MICE travellers' behaviour. Likewise, selling activities and information-gathering are important for attendees at an exhibition (Whitfield and Dioko, 2014). Predictably, the current study found the information centre or one-stop service to be a priority of Thailand (importance mean score 4.32; performance mean score 3.91), but the factor appeared in the low priority area of Figure 8.1. This was also an issue in Bangkok and Phuket. Only Khon Kaen has a one-stop service (Khon Kaen MICE Management or KKMM). This is a non-profit organization established in 2017 with the

cooperation of local leaders, local entrepreneurs, and guests, coordinating the destination management of Khon Kaen. KKMM is a very diverse organization with 82 members, including event organizers, tour operators, hotels, restaurants, industrial plants, academic staff, government officials, state enterprises, real estate, logistics, information technology, mass communication, software, public and private consultants, school owners, training institutions, etc. KKMM aims to make Khon Kaen a convenient city to provide fully-integrated MICE services. The aim of the KKMM is to provide services to MICE industry operators at provincial, regional, national and international levels, leading to a sustainable income for Khon Kaen and the rest of the country. This organization could be an excellent example for other MICE cities in Thailand. According to results from the current study, it was agreed that a one-stop service in each MICE city could be a critical success factor. Some participants mentioned the confusing process in event planning could be easier if there was a one-stop service in each MICE city. However, the one-stop service should operate as a non-profit organization, providing unbiased information and services. The idea of having something like the KKMM in their own cities impressed other MICE cities, especially Pattaya, since Pattaya is the only city in which it was found that the one-stop service was a priority factor that should be improved.

I like the concept of the one-stop service centre that Khon Kaen has because it could make the event planning process more comfortable.
(Event planner, Pattaya)

The idea of service availability and the list of local event planners as well as accommodation in one place could be convenient especially for the international customer.
(Hotel, Pattaya)

This finding acknowledges that having a local one-stop service centre could improve a MICE destination. As planning an event may be done years in advance, MICE travel agencies are usually affiliated with large corporations. Therefore, if the city could market itself as a MICE city and provide useful information and service, they might be able to offer subsidies to attract significant events and increase the revenue visitors bring through their economic impact on the host location.

8.2.14 Risk Prevention (17)

'Risk' in the Thai context has been defined based on events in the past, such as political unrest and natural disasters. In the interviews, a few participants mentioned that their clients were worried about Thai politics and the risk of crime. Figure 8.1 shows that risk prevention was found as a priority, but located in the low priority area. Risk prevention was found as a priority for Phuket (see Chapter 6) in particular. The risk posed by natural disasters and the weather was mentioned by respondents with relevant experience:

Since the tsunami happened in Phuket and also the other five provinces along the southern coast years ago, we have suffered a lot for a few years as the business went down and no one wants to come to Phuket. However, now we have the warning system which they said it is the best in Southeast Asia. Everything is getting better and better and back to normal finally. However, still, whenever we have to host an event on the beach or along the coast, we still have to confirm with our customers that we have a good security and risk prevention system.
(Event planner, Phuket)

Because of the political issues from years ago, at the time our company had a tough time as many groups cancelled and move to other countries. This kind of thing we could not control or predict but we have learned from the past how to prevent and manage a potential risk.
(Event planner, Phuket)

Hence, this could be why risk prevention was found as a priority in Phuket specifically. Rogers (1998) suggests that both data and the experience and background of a person can form the determination of risk. The findings from the current study confirm that risk prevention was considered a priority in promoting and developing MICE destinations. Consequently, precisely determined and appropriate prevention and protective measures need to be taken into account for the event professional as well as comprehensive checklists, which include numerous potential risks that could affect the success of projects (McLaurin & Wykes, 2003). Many studies found safety and security to be the most important factors in the site selection process (Oppermann, 1996; Upchurch, Clements and Jung, 1999; Hinkin and Tracey, 2003; DiPietro et al., 2008). The forms of risk could be influenced by different factors such as personal judgments, culture, perceptions, and experience (Rogers, 1998; Andersson & Armbrrecht, 2014). The risk in the context of business tourism perhaps contains several elements, such as crowd size, weather conditions, the

location of the event (Tarlow, 2002) as well as uncontrolled and unpredictable risks, such as the possibility of strikes, natural disasters, boycotts, and other possible adverse events (Crouch et al., 2008).

8.2.15 Risk management (16)

This factor is similar to risk prevention: event planners need to be aware of both legal concerns and ethical responsibilities to protect their attendees. Chapter 4 explained that risk could be defined in many different forms and event planners could consider the probability of incidence and likely potential moments when they might occur (Toohey & Taylor, 2008). This current study found the management of risk and damage as a critical priority issue, in Phuket (performance mean score 4.64; performance mean score 4.00) and Khon Kaen (performance mean score 4.03; performance mean score 4.43). The participants note that risk is potential harm and hard to predict. As respondents observed:

As a tourist city, we always have policemen around, not only in the venue but around [so that] policemen could be seen around the city most of the time. This could be a benefit of gaining the trust of MICE travellers about our security system, risk prevention and also risk management within the city.

(Government/Trade Associations, Pattaya)

Pattaya is well-known as a dark tourism destination and we have to accept that. There are people from all over the world visiting Pattaya. So you cannot guarantee that there will be no risk or any harm at all. However, [...] we could try to manage and reduce the risk. For example, we ask for the ID cards of all of the guests staying in our hotel when they book the room as well as asking for the ID of a visitor if necessary. However, there are still many things that happen in every single day. So I think we do need to really focus on the risk management and take it very seriously.

(Hotel, Pattaya)

Even though risk management was not found as a priority for the other cities, the participants agreed this should be taken as a critical success factor in developing MICE destinations.

In the outline of an exhibition or meeting, we need to put the layout of the event as well as the facilities and fire exits, and important contact numbers. This could assure guests that we are concerned about security and risk prevention and management.

(Event planner, Bangkok)

A risk management plan can at least show that the event planner has considered [safety and risk] and already has a plan if anything happens during, before and after the event.
(Hotel, Chiang Mai)

Some scholars indicated that risk could not be predicated accurately, but the profession could learn from the past. However, the key to developing risk assessment and risk management tools is that there is not one solution. Risk management strategies may depend on event planners' experience.

8.2.16 Training courses (18)

Training was found as a low priority in Thailand as a whole (importance mean score 4.31; performance mean score 3.99) and Bangkok (importance mean score 4.29; performance mean score 3.95). It was found as a priority and low performance in Phuket (importance mean score 4.45; performance mean score 3.82) and an area of possible overkill in Chiang Mai (importance mean score 4.47; performance mean score 4.18).

As Chapter 2 indicated, the MICE industry has not been long established in Thailand and is still in a developing state. The qualitative findings in chapter 6 highlighted the limited number of workers with sufficient ability and knowledge in MICE. In academia, the MICE subject is now gaining more attention from many universities in Thailand and TCEB as a leader of MICE industry in Thailand has been providing training courses for stakeholders which has been really helpful, from the comments of participants:

MICE is something new and a bit different from tourism industry so there are still a lot to learn. I am so glad that many universities now have started teaching MICE as we will have more worker who are ready to work in MICE straightaway.
(Event planners, Phuket)

I tried to attend the course provided by TCEB which it is really helpful and I think maybe not need to study a MICE degree but a short training course could be the best option for people who cannot really go back to an education.
(Venue, Khon Kaen)

I think a training course is a good opportunity to improve the skills of workers but on my opinion learning by doing day by day could be the best. Since practical is different from theoretical I suppose.
(Government, Chiang Mai)

The training course factor was found to be a priority issue to be considered, particularly for Phuket. This is supported by studies such as that by Fenich and Hashimoto (2010), who suggest that specific education and specific training courses positions are needed for workers in the MICE industry. Kuo, Chen and Lin (2010) and Uansa-ard and Binprathan (2018) indicated that knowledge and training can help staff to be fully prepared for the challenges of work, and also can help to develop the business and better service quality in the MICE industry. Therefore, training should be taken as a priority for developing MICE cities.

IV. Possible overkill

This quadrant captures those attributes that suggest over-performance, in which resources are being directed at attributes that have a minimal impact on the firm's or destination's relative competitiveness. These attributes signify the inefficient use of resources and should be the lowest priority.

The study found symbols and policies to be factors that participants rated as excellent in performance but lower in importance. Even though the factors are located in the possible overkill quadrant, this does not mean they should be ignored, as in raw numerical terms the IPA results show that the importance level is still higher than the performance, as noted in the qualitative material. Interviews reflected that the MICE industry has been extremely popular recently and TCEB has created policies and strategies to promote and improve the industry. Many marketing activities has been launched to ensure that people are aware of the industry. Consequently, to maintain good performance and enhance competitiveness, the factors that are located in this area should still considered as important (hence only 'possible' overkill).

8.2.17 Symbols (4)

In the context of this study, symbols refer to something that reminded people of the MICE city: things, people or a venue. This factor was considered an area of possible overkill for all of Thailand (importance mean score 4.32; performance mean score 4.07), Bangkok (importance mean score 4.19; performance mean score 4.02) and Khon Kaen (importance mean score 4.50; performance mean score 4.26). On the other hand, symbols were found as area in which to concentrate in Phuket (importance mean score 4.59; performance 3.86), perhaps

because (as some participants suggested), a symbol of Phuket as a MICE city could help establish it more strongly.

I heard that Khon Kaen has their own symbol for [them as a] MICE city, which is a really good idea. It would be nice if we could create our own MICE symbol. As Phuket has no venue for me now, the city is not really presenting [itself] as a MICE city enough yet. So, something representing [Phuket] as MICE city is something to think about.
(Event planner, Phuket)

Phuket is already a good destination for MICE activity [...]. So maybe thinking about something new would be more fun, and yes, a gimmick or symbol of Phuket as a MICE city can be a good idea. Since we have many souvenirs, why not create another one for the MICE as well?
(Government/Trade Associations, Phuket)

This is supported by few studies (e.g. Aaker, 2004; Akala, Laetti, and Sandberg, 2011), which found that branding a destination can represent the functional, empirical and symbolic nature of the destination in a helpful way.

8.2.18 Policies (8)

This factor appeared in the ‘possible overkill’ quadrant for Thailand as a whole (importance mean score 4.27; performance mean score 4.11) and Bangkok (importance mean score 4.24; performance mean score 4.10). This factor refers to policies of developing and promoting a MICE city in Thailand, developed by the leadership or policy-makers, since Chapter 1 indicated that the MICE industry in Thailand has only emerged last decade and it is still unfamiliar for Thai people. TCEB, as the leadership of the Thai MICE industry, has made an effort to promote and improve the MICE industry. Therefore, most of the businesses and stakeholders in Thailand rely on TCEB’s policy. This could be why the policies factor has been found as a priority of Thailand as a whole, and especially in Bangkok.

We tried to work follow TCEB gridline as TCEB always been a big supporter and provider information and even marketing plan.
(Event planner, Bangkok)

On the other hand, some participants were concerned that TCEB has intervened too much and it might affect their business, as in the comment below:

I have been running my own business for more than 20 years now and it used to be very well until MICE and TCEB happened. I am not

complaining about the help that TCEB providing but sometimes it make me work harder as I have to change the way I run the business according to the policies made by the TCEB
(Event planner, Khon Kaen)

These comments may reflect why policy was found as a possible overkill factor for Thailand as a whole. Qualitative findings from Chapter 6 suggested that policies and policy-makers clearly play an important role of developing MICE cities. This view is supported by Hawkins and Mann (2007), who indicate that policy-makers with a clear marketing strategy are considered a key success factor in destination management.

Even though the factors of symbols and policy are found in the possible overkill area, these factors are still considered key success factors in developing a MICE city, as reflected in the interviewees' comments.

8.3 Destination benchmarking tool for event planning and destination choice

The objective of this study is to assess the relevance and usefulness of a destination benchmarking tool for destination development and competitiveness within the MICE sector, using Thailand and its chosen MICE cities as case studies. The BESTBET framework has been developed for the UK or developed countries (Haven-Tang, 2006) and this study attempts to apply it in a different context. It is quite extraordinary that even though the MICE industry in Thailand has developed recently, including the selection of these five MICE cities, and has generated a considerable income for the country, no studies have been carried out on MICE destinations in Thailand or their competitiveness using an integrative measurement tool. Chapter 3 explained the process of benchmarking by comparing it with the best practice. Furthermore, benchmarking helps to improve the performance of an organization, but if the balance between the desired strategic outputs and the basic principles of organization dynamics and culture are disturbed, it may result in a significant cost for the organization as a whole (Hwang and Lockwood, 2006).

On the other hand, in the practitioner literature, whether a comparison is possible and meaningful is often not perceived as posing a particular problem. Benchmarking as an exact method would inevitably take too long to conduct from the practitioner's point of view, or else it would probably not produce

results that are easy to communicate (Walgenbach and Hegele, 2001). This study, therefore, attempted to address this issue by identifying best practice and a set of critical success factors in developing MICE destinations, as well as expanding the conceptual logic of MICE destination benchmarking based on the BESTBET framework.

The study conducted an exploratory qualitative inquiry (Chapter 6) as more meaningful for discovering which determinants influence developing MICE destinations. From 31 in-depth interviews, 21 specific factors were raised, which research participants identify as related variables with significant influence on MICE destination development in Thailand. Having identified what variables impact the BESTBET framework, it was deemed necessary to investigate the relevance and importance of each element in the framework. Although theoretically the BESTBET determinants could be the same in other destinations, this is highly unlikely as Crouch and Louviere (2007) suggest that the relative importance of each element in each destination will differ. Therefore, it is important for destination managers to know the relative salience of the variables that determine the destination performance for each individual area, because this indicates where they need to focus and what strategic orientation to adopt in allocating scarce resources. The 21 variables were identified in the interviews (Chapter 6), since the primary purpose of the analysis is to understand the survey respondents' perceptions. The results were examined for corroborative or contradictory evidence to sustain or question the factors that emerged from the qualitative inquiry, as presented in Table 8.1.

To summarize, the BESTBET framework can be considered a useful tool for benchmarking businesses and tourism destinations and can ultimately be applied in different international contexts. However, to develop a useful benchmarking tool for MICE destinations in a Thai context specifically, additional factors, including tourist attractions, the reputation of a city, annual events, security, damage process, and one-stop services should be added to the existing framework. These findings could be used to develop a conceptual framework for developing MICE cities in a Thai context, as offering the best service and achieving the highest levels of customer satisfaction is the goal of every country. Since every country is unique, with different attractions, cultures, traditions and context, each of which may or may not be of interest to visitors. The findings address the aim of study, providing the key factors that contribute

to destination benchmarking practices and identifying additional factors that influence destination benchmarking.

As mentioned, in order to benchmark, investigations need to be made as to what factors should be assessed and whom to benchmark with. Chapter 3 provided theoretical and previous studies that applied benchmarking to tourist destinations. The concept of benchmarking is a process of performance comparison, gap identification and consequent changes in management (Watson, 1993). Tourism destination benchmarking could help destinations to improve their performance levels and set a standard of products and services (Kozak, 2000). To enhance performance, destinations have to compare themselves with other similar destinations. As benchmarking is a continuous learning process, destinations can learn from others considered to be examples of best practice and take steps to improve themselves. Different destinations may be perceived to have unique advantages and disadvantages as well as the personal experiences of the visitors. Thus, each should be aware of others' work, and work to evolve their marketing plan and develop new products and services (Mentzer et al., 1995).

The current study, therefore, implemented the BESTBET framework as a guide to develop a conceptual framework for benchmarking MICE destinations in the Thai context. The results of IPA helped to establish priority criteria factors and planning development in order to gain a competitive advantage. These results could be helpful for indicating performance, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of each destination. Proper benchmarking could assist in the management of a destination by comparison against itself or another destination.

Table 8.1 Priority factors for developing each MICE city in a Thai context

| Attribute | Factors | Thailand | Phuket | Khon Kaen | Bangkok | Chiang Mai | Pattaya |
|-----------|---------------------------|----------|--------|-----------|---------|------------|---------|
| 10 | Transportation | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |
| 5 | Awareness | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | |
| 1 | Bidding Process | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| 17 | Risk Prevention | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| 16 | Risk Management | | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| 2 | Supportive | ✓ | | | ✓ | | |
| 3 | Good represent | | ✓ | | | ✓ | |
| 13 | Experience | ✓ | | ✓ | | | |
| 7 | Networking/ communication | | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| 12 | Workflow | | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| 6 | One-stop Service | | ✓ | | | | |
| 4 | Symbol | | ✓ | | | | |
| 11 | Technology | | ✓ | | | | |
| 14 | Foreign language | | | | | | |
| 15 | Availability | | ✓ | | | | |
| 18 | Training courses | | ✓ | | | | |

8.4 Conclusion

All the results in this chapter contribute to knowledge in order to improve the performance of MICE cities in Thailand. The findings indicate that the BESTBET framework is relevant and useful as a destination benchmarking tool for MICE destinations in the Thai context. The participants raised ten priorities to attend to when developing MICE cities in Thailand. Overall, participants agreed that MICE cities in Thailand perform well and are improving in terms of quality and service. A few factors in each city need additional consideration. However, the MICE cities can benchmark themselves by comparing their performance in terms of factors agreed by the majority of key stakeholders in Thailand.

Chapter 9. Conclusions and Implications

9.1 Introduction

This final chapter presents the key findings of this study and draws conclusions as to how the research has contributed to the principles of tourism knowledge and how it may assist future studies. Specifically, this chapter highlights the theoretical contributions of conducting a dyadic mixed-methods research project and illustrates the precise contributions of such a study. To account for the main contributions of the study and how the overarching aim of the research was accomplished, the four key research questions are revisited. Findings are discussed in line with each of these research questions in order to combine the perspectives of supply and demand, managers and guests, and in doing so, draw more complete and meaningful conclusions. This chapter also identifies the limitations of the study. On the basis of the research findings, the chapter concludes with suggestions regarding the priorities that need to be attended to develop MICE cities and a MICE destination benchmarking tool in Thailand.

9.2 Research outcomes

9.2.1 Is destination benchmarking a useful strategic planning tool for the Thai MICE sector ?

The first research question of this study relates to assessing the relevance and usefulness of a destination benchmarking tool for event planning and destination choice. The BESTBET framework (Haven-Tang, Jones and Webb, 2006) was developed for the UK or developed countries. This has been an attempt to apply it in a different context. It is quite extraordinary that, for example, even though MICE industry in Thailand and MICE cities has been developed and generate an income to the country, no studies have been carried out on MICE destinations in Thailand competitiveness by an integrative measurement tool. By addressing these issues, the study contributes on both theoretical and empirical grounds.

This research was undertaken with the intention of, firstly, revealing stakeholders' concerns and understanding of factors they consider important for developing MICE destinations, and secondly to adopt a more critical perspective of the factors that they consider important. Having identified what variables impact the BESTBET framework, it was deemed necessary to find the relevance

and importance of each element in the framework. Participants were alert and excited at the idea of improving their products and services in order to enhance the MICE industry. All the factors from the BESTBET framework were considered critical success factors, but understandably some factors were better understood than others within a Thai context. Several additional factors were highlighted in a Thai context, as described in previous chapters. The findings suggest that it is important for destination managers to know the relative salience of the variables that determine a destination's performance, because this indicates where they need to focus and what strategic orientation to adopt in allocating scarce resources. The 21 variables discussed were found in developing MICE destinations in Thailand (see Chapter 4), since the primary purpose of the factor analysis is to understand the structure of the survey respondents' perceptions of variables that determine the success of MICE destinations in Thailand. The BESTBET framework can be considered a useful tool for the benchmarking of business and tourism destinations and can ultimately be applied in different international contexts. However, to develop a useful benchmarking tool for MICE destinations in a Thai context specifically, additional factors had to be added to the existing framework.

9.2.2 What factors are useful in developing destination benchmarking frameworks in the MICE sector of Thailand ?

The results found fifteen factors based on BESTBET, and six additional factors emerged from the interviews. The total of 21 key factors were thus taken into account in order to develop MICE destination benchmarking. This reveals how respondents connect and correlate 21 key factors to test if the variables underlying BESTBET are reliable. The results were examined for corroborative or contradictory evidence to sustain or question the framework emerging from the qualitative inquiry. The findings demonstrate that respondents can discern between variables specific to MICE destination benchmarking.

Chapter 3 demonstrated what needed to be clarified before benchmarking begins. To identify additional factors that might influence destination benchmarking practice, IPA was used to identify the gap between importance and performance in products and services (William and Pessemier, 1973). The process began by seeking a significant difference in the levels of

importance between attributes, by conducting individual paired-samples t-tests were conducted to measure the gaps between importance and performance for individual attributes. These results indicated the areas that the respondents were concerned about. These attributes were then plotted on IPA graphs to present the performance of overall MICE tourism in Thailand as a whole, as well as in individual MICE cities. Furthermore, priority factors that participants are concerned about with regard to each destination were highlighted. This allowed each MICE city to understand its performance and the areas that needed improvement.

9.2.3 Do the factors from existing destination benchmarking models apply to specific international contexts?

One of the study objectives is to provide a valid MICE destination benchmarking conceptual framework and assess the performance of the five MICE cities (Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Khon Kaen, Pattaya, and Phuket). Figure 9.1 shows the conceptual framework logic of MICE destination benchmarking. The conceptual framework of MICE destination IPA is identified as a potentially suitable technique to achieve this objective, but it requires substantive modification. The IPA technique in tourism generally involves various techniques, such as the scale-centered, the data-centered and the diagonal variants of IPA frameworks, as well as direct and indirect measures. The question is which combination of models and measures offers a valid technique for predicting priorities for action. Previous studies in tourism concluded that there is no universally optimal combination because the technical design is dependent on different research settings (Lai and Hitchcock, 2015). The current study used means and diagonal methods as the most appropriate IPA framework for this thesis. Also, it suggests the use of direct measures of priorities to establish the gradient of the diagonal line and to ascertain the predictive validity of the model (Azzopardi, 2011b).

The results of the comparison between priority expectations on the critical success factors and performances on those factors have been used to develop a MICE destination benchmarking conceptual framework. In doing so, this study addresses two important gaps in the literature. First, the study proposes an approach that considers stakeholders' expectations to evaluate MICE cities, which enables stakeholders to determine to what extent their

performance expectations are met. In principle, the proposed approach adds an extra dimension to the measurement of the performance of MICE cities in Thailand. Second, the proposed method allows stakeholders to benchmark their MICE city's performance against other similar cities. The results from the evaluation allow performance benchmarking among the MICE cities. This approach is a slightly modified version of the IPA framework (see Chapter 5).

Fig 9.1 Conceptual logic of MICE destination benchmarking of Thailand

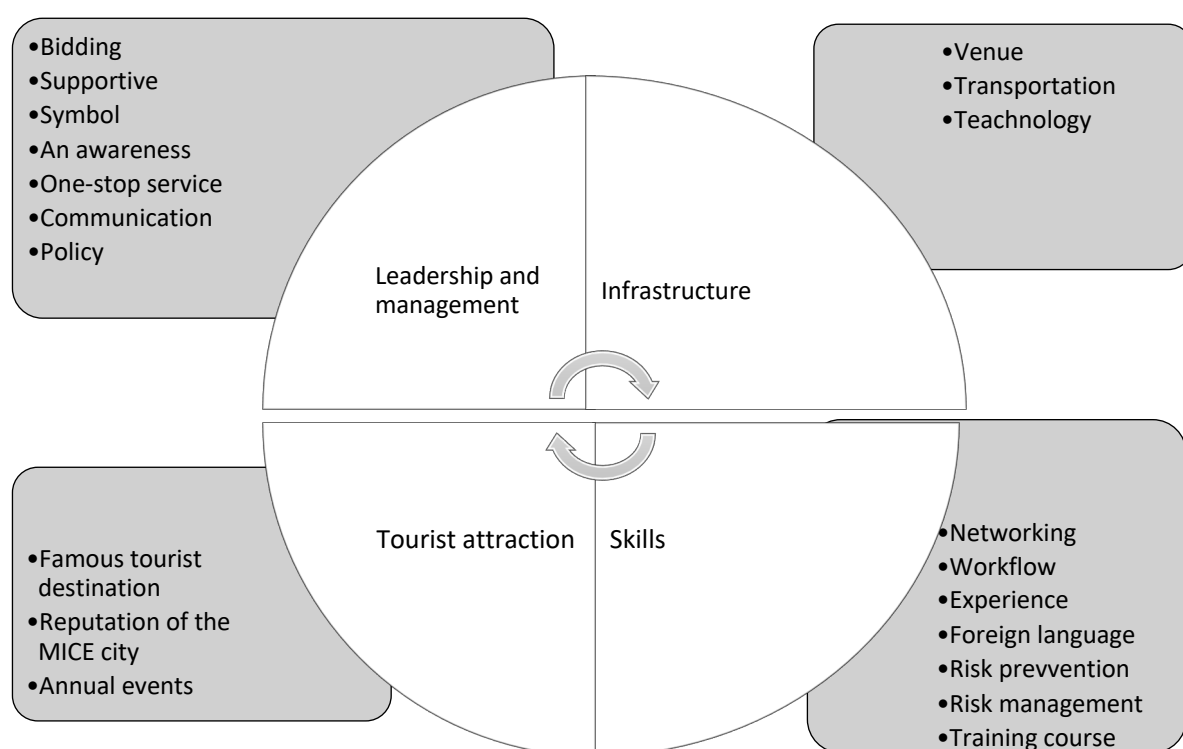


Fig 9.1 illustrates the three original areas from the BESTBET framework that should be considered in MICE destination benchmarking: leadership and management, infrastructure, and skills. However, the figure also includes tourist attractions, which was identified as a new factor from the study. The tourist attraction can include being a famous tourist destination, the reputation of the MICE city and annual events. Participants indicated that, whilst the primary purpose of the MICE traveller trip is for work or business, the entertainment available afterwards would be an important consideration for destination selection. Chapter 2 demonstrated that tourist attractions are one of the elements that the MICE and leisure sectors share, as noted by Swarbrooke and Horner

(2001). Consequently, the results from the study suggest that tourist attractions (which could be a famous destination within a MICE city), the reputation of the city, or even an events festival can help to promote a destination and attract more MICE visitors.

The findings shown in Figure 9.1 have implications for MICE destination benchmarking strategies undertaken by stakeholders in the MICE industry. The conceptual logic of MICE destination benchmarking of Thailand that presents in figure 9.1 could provide some guidelines for policymakers and decision-makers on resource allocation to enhance competition in the MICE industry. The findings could support a destination that is committed to creating value and improving its competitiveness benefits from knowing its weakness and strengths and deploying marginal resources to attributes that have the most significant impact on the MICE destination

Research findings indicate that the factors from the BESTBET framework can be considered as key success factors. However, tourist attractions should be added to a conceptual benchmarking framework for Thailand. For MICE destinations in Thailand, leadership and management, infrastructure, skills, and tourist attractions represent the lifeline of the MICE industry. Long-term marketing strategies are critical to putting the destination on the map, creating images that communicate the destination to potential MICE travellers. Furthermore, improving the infrastructure and skills of workers by providing training courses would be a way to improve the performance of the MICE-destination. More recommendations on factors and components in the short-, medium- and long-term are provided in the section below.

9.2.4 Identifying best practice in order to become a MICE destination

Although all 21 factors of MICE destination development deserve attention and monitoring, this analysis focuses on priority issues. After reporting on the study's general findings, the discussion turns to the factors that participants felt most urgent. The study has identified 21 MICE-related factors that deserve immediate attention and resources to improve the MICE destinations' performance (Chapter 7). Each priority is discussed in turn, highlighting the extent of the problem and potential action for improvement.

There are some factors worth considering to improve matters in the short-term, including *Supportive leadership, Infrastructure, Venue and Technology, Risk prevention and Risk Management*. These factors should be considered short-term improvements in the sense that their immediate attention would have the greatest impact on the success of other factors. For example, supportive and leadership might include policy, marketing activities and financial support. At the moment, Thai managerial systems are centralized in TCEB, in the Bangkok office. This means the policy and decision-making, as well as the aspects of communication, coordination, and funding, have been centrally made by TCEB and in turn, have not been distributed into each area, as the MICE management system depends on the TCEB organization. Most participants agreed that TCEB has helped with development, but local government, who truly understand the nature and the context of each city, should take more action and provide more support, rather than rely on TCEB alone.

Likewise, *Infrastructure* which included transportation and accessibility, is the standard criteria found in previous studies as part of site selection and destination and venue attributes (DiPietro et al., 2008). Transport issues in Thailand, especially in the MICE cities, is considered extremely important and in need of improvement. The study found two main issues that the participants were concerned about: traffic jams and varied fees in the public transport system. Furthermore, an accurate and reliable timetable of public transportation is considered a priority issue to be resolved. Similarly, *Venues and Technology* was also found as a basic facility needed within the MICE industry. The findings show that one of the reasons these five cities were selected to promote as MICE cities is because they have a standard venue with good technological support for the MICE traveller. As Chapter 2 indicated, the MICE group has specific needs in terms of venues and technology (Swarbrooke and Horner, 2001).

Another factor that could be included in a short-term plan for improvement is *Risk Prevention and Risk Management*. Although MICE is part of the tourism industry, they differ in the level of uncertainty contained within the experience. Some element of risk might be found in MICE activities depending on the nature of the event, crowd size, weather conditions and the location (Tarlow, 2002). The study found that risk prevention and risk management systems are important to both stakeholders and guests. Several

participants observed that to plan an event such as a large exhibition needs more consideration than the other MICE activities. Also, MICE travellers are concerned about security and safety. For instance, the political crisis and tsunami that happened in Thailand several years ago had an extremely damaging effect on the MICE industry. Therefore, to attract more MICE travellers, a destination should be able to show an awareness of any potential harm and provide a plan to both manage and recover after a risk.

There are some factors from the study required medium-term solutions, such as *Awareness, Promoting a good image of the city as a MICE city, Symbols, One-Stop service, Networking and Communication, and Bidding*. The medium-term recommendations of this study focus on marketing strategies, as described below. For example, a participant from the local authority of a MICE city mentioned that “as the city is already famous in tourism due to the resources we have, there is no difference between before and after the city has been promoting as a MICE city, and [I am] not sure if residents realize this.” This supported a study on creating *awareness* of halal MICE tourism business in Chiang Mai, which found that the stakeholders in the MICE industry lack understanding of the services required by Muslim travellers. The study also found that the lack of quality and standard of service is a major obstacle to MICE business, especially in the international markets (Uansa-ard and Binprathan, 2018). *Awareness* is a top priority issue that needs to be resolved in order to continue developing the MICE cities.

A majority of participants observed that there is a confusion between leisure destinations and MICE destinations in many cities, because the cities selected as MICE cities are already well-known as tourist destinations. Therefore, *promoting a good image of the city as a MICE destination* specifically is important to attract the right target market. Williams and Ashill (2011) indicated that destination branding is a strategy that marketers apply to clarify the characteristics and uniqueness of the destination. Likewise, Kolb (2011) indicates that business and event tourism destination branding promotes the area, attempting to answer the question “Why should I visit your city?” Promoting a MICE city educates visitors, allowing them to differentiate destinations from each other (Rogers, 2006).

Symbols refer to marketing activities or branding. Rompf, Breiter and Severt (2009) suggest that symbols, logos or characteristics of a city are

considered part of destination branding, and form a set of primary attributes recognized as a brand image. This factor has been raised as a priority because some participants observed that this is needed to distinguish MICE tourism from leisure tourism. Khon Kaen is the only city that has a chosen symbol (a dinosaur) to mark it as a MICE city. This pioneer project has caught the attention of other MICE cities, especially Phuket. Consequently, in order to enhance competition, a symbol should be considered.

In a Thai context, a *One-stop service* could mean a local office in a MICE city that could provide information. There is currently one non-profit association (the KKMM) in one MICE destination (Khon Kaen), and this is considered a good example for the remaining MICE cities. The aim of the one-stop service is to simplify a complicated process of contacts and searching for information on the relevant products and services in the city. Some participants suggest that TCEB should have a local office in each MICE city to provide full support and comprehensive information to each of the five chosen MICE cities.

Given the high competition in the MICE industry, *Networking and Communication* among stakeholders has become more critical (Morrison, Bruen and Anderson, 1998). There are many players with different roles, as outlined in Chapter 2, and this could create conflict among the stakeholders. Therefore, it is suggested that the CVBs take responsibility for setting strategic objectives (Buhalis, 2000), as well as supporting networking and cooperation among the stakeholders to enhance competitiveness. Some participants agreed that working and sharing as a team could provide huge benefits. Haven-Tang and Webb (2007) found that external networking enhances market intelligence for event planners. On the other hand, some participants were concerned that sharing information with competitors made them vulnerable. As mentioned, the MICE industry in Thailand is newly-established and therefore networking might not yet provide a clear advantage. The TCEB, as a leader in MICE, has supported and helped the membership to improve their businesses (see Chapter 2).

Another factor that should be improved in the medium term is *bidding*, which was found by many previous studies, including the BESTBET study, to be important. The performance here is so low relative to its perceived importance that it is assigned top priority status, requiring considerable resources to improve. Efforts to deal with this perennial problem have been dismally ineffective. In interview, many people admitted that they have “no idea

what bidding for events is and why it is so important and how to win the bidding process.” This study found that to improve the bidding, stakeholders need more experience, better understanding, better facilities and more marketing activities, as well as more bidding resources.

Long-term plans aim to react to the competitive situation of the destination. To enhance the benefits for the economic, social, and political environment and develops strategies for adapting and influencing its position to achieve long-term goals. When short-term and medium-term planning is successful, long-term planning builds on those achievements to preserve accomplishments and ensure continued progress.

The study considered the skills of workers, which included experience and workflow, and collaboration of workers in the MICE industry as long-term plans. The findings showed several issues based on the experience of workers that may need time to improve. As explained in Chapter 2, the MICE industry is relatively new to Thailand, and therefore many staff working in the MICE industry lack *experience*. The study found the experience of workers in MICE in the destination needed to improve, as participants observed that most of the time clients prefer a planner who has experience, rather a new business. Education and training courses that have been provided by TCEB and universities will help here.

Workflow and collaboration of workers in the MICE industry could improve as those workers gain experience. Previous studies suggest that collaboration enhances understanding and mutually benefits stakeholders, leading to better outcomes for the host community generally. Not many people consider collaboration serious and necessary, as the interviewees felt that not every member would get the same sort and amount of benefit. The TCEB has tried to convince its membership and set up meetings for local stakeholders, but there is little active participation. Likewise, Creswell and Miller (2000) and Yodsuwan (2009) found that some reluctant stakeholders in business destination management still hold back from the collaboration process.

These recommendations may helped stakeholders to reconsider the destination development plan. Such a plan should be monitored and updated in order to achieve the long-term aim. Any problems in these areas seriously constrain overall the MICE destination competitiveness. Research results also point to the need that local authorities should rely on TCEB.

9.3 Recommendations to improve the priority factors

The results identifying the barriers for MICE destinations to carry out best practice are supported by previous research. The factors of awareness and transport suggest that although many projects start out with great management fanfare, practical specifics fade from their radar. Leadership and management involvement at all phases of the cycle of success is essential in reconfiguring operations, to improve agility. The study also identified a number of barriers to success. Possible solutions for overcoming these barriers might lie with the application of the new tool of networking benchmarking, which describes businesses networking (Kyrö, 2003).

The study suggests that, rather than copying competitors, destinations should motivate one another by sharing experience in networks to tackle mutual problems for future excellence. The research also raises issues about the extent to which the MICE sector in Thailand has the resources or inclination to implement best practice. Furthermore, when thinking about developing MICE destinations, focusing at the strategic level together with addressing the pertinent issues that emerge from current business priorities, could be considered as the key theme. Even though some priority factors were placed in a 'low priority' area or 'possible overkill' areas on the IPA graph, some extra work may still be needed to improve these factors, particularly where the IPA findings demonstrate a level of importance higher than the performance level. Additionally, the findings of the interviews reflected that factors in these areas were important in MICE city development. Furthermore, there is still effort that needs to be maintained in the 'keep up good work' quadrant in order to improve the MICE cities in Thailand.

9.4 Contributions to knowledge

The original contribution of this research has been to examine MICE destination benchmarking critically. The findings provide an understanding of important factors that should be considered when developing a conceptual logic of MICE destination benchmarking, and enhance understanding of ways to improve additional factors and identify best practice in order to become a MICE-destination.

Specifically, the research has contributed to three broad areas. First, the research has made theoretical contributions by developing and extending the current MICE destination benchmarking literature by assessing the BESTBET framework and extending it to incorporate a different context of MICE destinations. The research confirmed that the BESTBET framework is relevant and useful to develop MICE destination benchmarking as a conceptual framework in the specified context, but that there is also scope for the framework to be extended to include other important factors. The implications of this are significant for both marketers and policy-makers to improve MICE sector benchmarking.

The second contribution of the research comes from the analysis. The study is one of the very few studies that introduced IPA methodology for measuring the importance and performance in various areas of a MICE destination. Results show that the diagonal variant of IPA measures a relative priority area that offers MICE destinations an opportunity to improve. These can assist them in policy formulation, and strategic and operational implementation of resource decisions. This research can be used to develop a plan and strategy for MICE destination development. This could provide an advantage for the TCEB or individual organizations, which might use this conceptual framework to improve the quality of service.

The third contribution of the research is geographical, modified for MICE destinations in Thailand and including additional factors from BESTBET to take into account the uniqueness of the country. The factors relating to best practice in the UK and Thailand, whilst similarities exist, there are also differences. Additionally, the findings also suggest that applying a Western business and event benchmarking model in Asian culture is revealing. However, several aspects need to be attended to, due to a different culture, including underlying beliefs, assumptions, values and ways of interacting that contribute to the unique social and psychological environment of an organization or country. The implications of the study could be indicators for future research in other destinations as well as different contexts.

9.5 Limitations of the study

In the final analysis, the study has achieved its objectives and contributed to the literature in developing a conceptual logic of MICE destination benchmarking. It provides critical factors for MICE destinations in Thailand, as well as assessing the performance of each MICE destination. It provides valuable information for MICE destinations in Thailand on improving their use of resources and capabilities to match international tourist demand. The research findings can be of value and provide a sound foundation for further conceptual, methodological and practical development. Nevertheless, some limitations are identified. These limitations can be a source of future research, discussed below.

In relation to this dynamic field of study, several limitations were recognized. Firstly, due to the confidential nature of the study, the data used in the case studies has been collected from many different sources, such as government websites, private organizations and reports from TCEB. However, in some cases, access to government reports and officials was restricted and obtaining data was problematic. Secondly, one of the main limitations of case study research is limited external validity and the challenge of making recommendations beyond the cases being studied. Although in-depth information is gathered, extrapolating to different situations could be problematic. However, generalizations made in the research are moderate and contribute to the theoretical understanding of MICE destination benchmarking issues and provide an academic framework for further study. Thirdly, in terms of the setting, it would be interesting to collect data from the end-user or MICE travellers who use the products and services in the MICE sector. As noted in Section 2.3.2, the MICE travellers have specific requirements in terms of products and services when compared to the leisure traveller. Since the aims of the study were to identify critical success factors based on experiences and attitudes of stakeholders, in this case MICE travellers were not included. Therefore, it would be interesting to further investigate critical success factors and understand them from the MICE traveller perspective. The combination of MICE travellers' experiences and reflections might be useful in order to develop a conceptual logic framework for MICE destination benchmarking.

Another limitation of the study is the methodological relationship between the importance and performance analysis and factors arising from interviews. At times, interviewees seemed to place greater levels of importance

on factors that were identified in the quantitative analysis as being less important, and vice-versa. The implications of this are twofold: first, it is pertinent to recall that IPA analysis does not render any factor unimportant, only that other factors require focus for improvement. So while, interviewees may have placed higher levels of importance on factors that were identified as less needy in the quantitative phase, this is not seen as contradictory or problematic. Second, it can be argued that this mixed-methods approach shines a light on areas of difference that would warrant further research. These have been outlined in section 9.6 below.

It can be argued that this should not have an impact on the results of the study because the outline on the survey seem to be very clear in each section. However, it would be helpful in the future to add some fake variables to spot response bias. Furthermore, other important elements were not found in the study, such as technology, smart cities, sustainability, and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). These could be included in future research, since previous studies found these elements can influence successful MICE destination development.

Lastly, there is a limitation that should be considered when interpreting IPA results. Factors that do not fall in the priority area may be easily construed as unimportant to MICE destination competitiveness and considered a waste of time and effort. While it is logical to prioritize resources and focus on priority areas for improvement, it is irrational for a destination to ignore attributes that have a positive or congruent competitiveness gap. It is possible that, without a good performance in these areas, overall destination competitiveness deteriorates, especially if these attributes are basic requirements for tourism growth. Notably, the qualitative findings observed that participants considered that these factors should be taken into account in order to improve the MICE destinations. Furthermore, over-performance on some of these attributes may be desirable to surprise MICE travellers or exceed their expectations, especially where product differentiation is minimal. This can have important implications for inter-sector and intra-industry resource allocation decisions. This is a gap for further research on MICE destination benchmarking.

9.6 Recommendations for Future Research

With respect to broader tourism research, this study has contributed to knowledge and has illuminated a number of avenues for future research. The importance of not only the MICE sector but in particular MICE destination development, which provides the greatest benefit for the tourism industry, has been noted. In particular, the study has served to act as a reminder for the need for more significant and continued critical investigation of the MICE sector and ways to improve MICE destinations and MICE destination benchmarking. Kozak (2006) and Webb, Haven-Tang, and Jones (2007) have attempted to underscore the importance of embracing emergent critical thought in the area. The gaps in this research further serve to remind us of the need for empirical research to focus on particular MICE activity attributes and requirements, as well as improved management when developing destinations for the specific demands of MICE activity. This serves to improve a destination's performance and value in its effort to match or exceed the wants of special interest MICE groups.

Research such as the present study highlights the need for a much more pronounced focus on exploring the applicability of leading research findings to other cities or countries that wish to improve in order to attract the MICE industry. The characteristics of a destination as well as its culture may influence the findings. In-depth examination of individual critical factors of MICE site selection such as bidding, leadership, tourist attractions, and risk prevention and management would be useful, not least for understanding something other than purely functional strategies of industry, but also for balancing the perspective of some campaigners, and acknowledging the efforts industry is making in the face of disjointed, and at times, misguided governmental intervention.

The impact of this research is evident in not just its findings, but also the identification of further areas worthy of exploration and investigation. While some important theoretical chances for further research have been identified, so too have a number of more practical ones. As with many other areas of tourism research, the topic of MICE destination benchmarking would benefit from further longitudinal studies to extend the knowledge created by cross-sectional research such as this. Using this research as a starting point, a number of future studies can be developed. Firstly, the critical factors that influence the development of conceptual MICE destination benchmarking need to be

explored further. For example, MICE destination benchmarking for the specific type of MICE activity (meeting – incentive – convention – exhibition). Rather than in-depth interviews, other methods could be used, such as focus groups, to gain insights into various aspects of the stakeholders' perspectives. If barriers to access could be negotiated, this could prove to be a fruitful avenue for investigation. Secondly, this study has limited the focus of the investigation to five MICE cities in Thailand because of time and cost constraints. However, it should be pointed out that this is an initial study, based on critical success factors relevant to MICE destinations in Thailand, developed from critical success factors from the BESTBET study, tested via analytical techniques.

Nevertheless, this may limit the generalisability of the study results. Additional research is required to explore the applicability of the main research findings to other cities or countries that wish to attract the MICE industry. Finally, this study is based on stakeholders' evaluations, which excludes the direct input of MICE travellers. It may be argued that at least some aspects of MICE destination benchmarking should take account of the needs of guests and that the performance of each MICE destinations can be measured directly by surveying MICE travellers. It will be instructive if future studies could incorporate MICE travellers' input on some model components.

9.7 Conclusion

The conceptual framework emerging from the research results, as well as the methodology and techniques employed in measuring MICE destination benchmarking models and identifying priorities, offer MICE stakeholders a practical and comprehensive tool that could guide and facilitate the development of policies and effective strategies in the future. The study provides useful insights in the assessment of a destination benchmarking conceptual framework, in the identification of attributes that need improvement, and the performance of the MICE cities. This allows stakeholders to make a comparison and espouse the adoption of strategies. Given the limited research in MICE destination development in an international context, the theoretical, methodological and empirical contributions of this study, as well as the implications of the research findings for MICE destination benchmarking, this study is of significant interest to researchers, policy-makers and practitioners.

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Appendix A- questionnaires



Developing MICE destination in Thai context (Thai Version)

Page 1: Explanation

Developing MICE destination in Thai context (Final)

Explanation

1. The objective of the study

To investigate the perception and expectations of important factors and performance of MICE's cities in Thailand from key stakeholders in MICE (Meeting-Incentive-ConferenceExhibition) industry.

The results will be an indicator and recommendations for continuing to be useful in better management. Relevant organizations are the guideline to enhance good corporate governance.

Exercises divided into 3 Sections

Section 1: About Your Organization

Section 2: An importance of key success factors

Section 3: Experiences and opinions about the MICE cities

2. Please provide feedback and suggestions.

3. Your answers will be confidential and will be processed as an overall report for the development of MICE city in Thai context

Section 1 The experience and opinions about the MICE city

Page 2: Section 3: The organization and your work

Please identify your organization

- Organiser
- travel agent
- Hotel/Accommodation
- Venue/Conference Hall
- Others

The duration of the business of your organization.

- 1-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- More than 20 years

what type of conferences/events did you organize in the last 5 years (2012-2016)

- Meeting
- Incentive
- Conference
- Exhibition
- Tourists
- Others

How many conferences/events did you organized in 2016? please select only one

- 10 or less
- 11-20
- 21-30
- 31-50
- More than 50

On average how many participants typically atteneted the conferences/evetns you organized in 2016?

- Less than 15
- 16-25
- 51-100
- 101-200
- 201-500
- More than 500

Page 3

Please choose the city that you have most experience in the past 5 years

Please choose the city you most working in the last 5 years

- Bangkok
- Chiang Mai
- Khon Kaen
- Pattaya
- Phuket

please rate these factors

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

| | very important | important | fairly | not really important | not important at all |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Availibility of transportation system | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Suitable venues | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Hight standart of technology | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Policies and supportative suit the needs of the workers | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. The bidding process is reliable | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

| | | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 6. Supportive from local or relevant agencies in the city in the process of bidding | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. The presentation of promoting a good imagine the city as a great MICE city | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. An awareness and realization of a MICE city of local people | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. The symbol or creation a unique composition which supposed to be a MICE city | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. Experience and knowledge of workers in MICE industry | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11. The availability and sufficiency of workers in MICE industry. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12. Foreign langues knowleage | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 13. A bility to communicate the workflow of the workers in MICE industry | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

| | | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 14. Training course to prepare and develop human resources in the MICE industry | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 15. One-stop service center coordinators need in each MICE city | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 16. The availability of prevention of risks | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 17. Risk and dangers management process | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 18. Risk prevention | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 19. A famous tourists attraction in the MICE city | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 20. The reputation of the city is well known | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 21. An annual events that are unique and recognizable | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Page 4: please rate this factors

please rate these factors for **Chiang Mai**

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

| | very satisfy | satisfy | fairly | not satisfy | not satisfy at all |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Availibility of transportation system | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Suitable venues | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Hight standart of technology | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Policies and supportative suit the needs of the workers | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. The bidding process is reliable | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. Supportive from local or relevant agencies in the city in the process of bidding | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. The presentation of promoting a good imagine the city as a great MICE city | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. An awareness and realization of a MICE city of local people | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

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| 9. The symbol or creation a unique composition which supposed to be a MICE city | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. Experience and knowledge of workers in MICE industry | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11. The availability and sufficiency of workers in MICE industry. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12. Foreign langues knowlege | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 13. A bility to communicate the workflow of the workers in MICE industry | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 14. Training course to prepare and develop human resources in the MICE industry | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 15. One-stop service center coordinators need in ecah MICE city | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 16. The availability of prevention of risks | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 17. Risk and dangers management process | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

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|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 18. Risk prevention | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 19. A famous tourists attraction in the MICE city | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 20. The reputation of the city is well knon | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 21. An annual evens that are unique and recognizable | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Page 5: Khon Kaen

please rate these factors for **Khon Kaen**

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

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| 1. Availibility of transportation system | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Suitable venues | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Hight standart of technology | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Policies and supportative suit the needs of the workers | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. The bidding process is reliable | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. Supportive from local or relevant agencies in the city in the process of bidding | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. The presentation of promoting a good imagine the city as a great MICE city | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. An awareness and realization of a MICE city of local people | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

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|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 9. The symbol or creation a unique composition which supposed to be a MICE city | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. Experience and knowledge of workers in MICE industry | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11. The availability and sufficiency of workers in MICE industry. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12. Foreign langues knowleage | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 13. A bility to communicate the workflow of the workers in MICE industry | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 14. Training course to prepare and develop human resources in the MICE industry | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 15. One-stop service center coordinators need in ecah MICE city | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 16. The availibility of prevention of risks | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 17. Risk and dangers management process | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 18. Risk prevention | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 19. A famous tourists attraction in the MICE city | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 20. The reputation of the city is well knon | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 21. An annual evens that are unique and recognizable | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Page 6: Pattaya

please rate these factors for **Pattaya**

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

| | very satisfy | satisfy | fairly | not satisfy | not satisfy at all |
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| 1. Availibility of transportation system | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Suitable venues | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Hight standart of technology | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Policies and supportative suit the needs of the workers | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
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| 6. Supportive from local or relevant agencies in the city in the process of bidding | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. The presentation of promoting a good imagine the city as a great MICE city | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. An awareness and realization of a MICE city of local people | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

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|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 9. The symbol or creation a unique composition which supposed to be a MICE city | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. Experience and knowledge of workers in MICE industry | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11. The availability and sufficiency of workers in MICE industry. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12. Foreign langues knowledge | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 13. A bility to communicate the workflow of the workers in MICE industry | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 14. Training course to prepare and develop human resources in the MICE industry | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 15. One-stop service center coordinators need in ecah MICE city | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 16. The availability of prevention of risks | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 17. Risk and dangers management process | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

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| 18. Risk prevention | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 19. A famous tourists attraction in the MICE city | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 20. The reputation of the city is well knon | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 21. An annual evens that are unique and recognizable | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Page 7: Phuket

please rate these factors for **Phuket**

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

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| 1. Availibility of transportation system | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Suitable venues | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
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| 6. Supportive from local or relevant agencies in the city in the process of bidding | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. The presentation of promoting a good imagine the city as a great MICE city | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. An awareness and realization of a MICE city of local people | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

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| 9. The symbol or creation a unique composition which supposed to be a MICE city | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. Experience and knowledge of workers in MICE industry | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11. The availability and sufficiency of workers in MICE industry. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
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| 14. Training course to prepare and develop human resources in the MICE industry | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 15. One-stop service center coordinators need in ecah MICE city | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 16. The availibility of prevention of risks | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
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| 18. Risk prevention | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
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| 20. The reputation of the city is well knon | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 21. An annual evens that are unique and recognizable | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Page 8: Others factors that you consider as an importance factor for developing MICE city

Others impotantct that you think it important and why is it important ?

Page 9: Thank you

Thank you for your participation

Appendix B Interview Guideline



Athrofa Busnes a'r Gyfraith
Adeilad Rheidol
Llanbadam, Aberystwyth
SY23 3AL, United Kingdom

Yr Athro Jo Crotty
Cyfarwyddwr yr Athrofa

ffôn : (01970) 622501
e-bost: joc62@aber.ac.uk
<https://www.aber.ac.uk/cy/ibl>

Institute of Business and Law
Rheidol Building
Llanbadam, Aberystwyth
SY23 3AL, United Kingdom

Professor Jo Crotty
Institute Director

Tel: (01970) 622501
e-mail: joc62@aber.ac.uk
<https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/ibl>

To whom it may concern,

Subject: An interview

I am currently undertaking a PhD on experience, developing in MICE industry under the supervision of Dr. Tiffany Low in the Aberystwyth Business School at Aberystwyth University. The study's aims are:

- A. To assess the relevant and usefulness of destination benchmarking tool for events planning and destination choice.
- B. To critically evaluate the key factors that contribute to destination benchmarking practice.
- C. To further, develop the concept of benchmarking for application within MICE destinations and to evaluate its potential impact on MICE destination performance.

I would like to take a face-to-face interview, which is expected to last maximum 45 – 60 minutes duration during 15th to 30th May 2017. The interview would take place in your organization. The questions would cover of creating MICE industry policy and experiences with regard to the destination. The responses would reflect policy and the management of the organization. I would like to interview the director or one of the staff from the following department

- Meeting, incentive Department
- Convention promotion Department
- Exhibition and Event Department
- Domestic MICE Department
- Marketing and corporate image Department
- Strategy Development Department

With regards to confidentiality and ethics, my research has received full ethics approval within Aberystwyth University and all data collected will only be used for my research. The data will be held securely and treated as confidential, with no disclosures being made to third parties. Any reference in my work will be fully anonymised so that the company and individuals cannot be identified. I will provide you with an access to the final thesis and I would be happy to offer you a brief presentation about the results on request.

I would be grateful if you can contact me via e-mail or telephone in order to discuss further about the research and how the data can be collected. If you would like any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

1

Thank you very much for your interest

Yours sincerely,

Philaiwan Chompupor

E-mail: phc10@aber.ac.uk Tel: 087-3630087



Developing MICE city in Thailand Benchmarking Approach

Participant Information Sheet

You are being invited to take part in a research study contributing to a PhD thesis. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

Who will conduct the research?

Philaiwan Chompupor, PhD candidate at Institute of Business and Law, Aberystwyth University, Rheidol Building Llanbadarn, Aberystwyth SY23 3AL, United Kingdomphc10@aber.ac.uk

Title of the Research

Developing MICE city in Thailand Benchmarking Approach

What is the aim of the research?

- 1. The aim of this study is to to assess the relevant and usefulness of destination benchmarking tool for events planning and destination choice.*
- 2. To critically evaluated the key factors that contribute to destination benchmarking practice.*
- 3. To further, develop the concept of benchmarking for application within MICE destinations and to evaluate its potential impact on MICE destination performance.*

What would I be asked to do if I took part?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to engage in the following activities:

First, you will be asked about your role and responsibility which related with MICE and also the operational in your organization.

Secondly, you will be asked to identify the key success factors which influencing in developing MICE city such as leadership, infrastructure, bidding, branding, ambassador etc.

Lastly, you will be ask about who is the key players in MICE industry.

There are no physical or psychological risks involved when taking part of this study.

What happens to the data collected?

Any information you give will be available only to the researchers involved in this study – two main supervisors and the PhD student. It will be used for a PhD thesis and for publications such as conferences, presentations, journals, and papers that arise from it. The data will all be completely anonymous and presented in on a confidential basis.

How is confidentiality maintained?

All data will be stored on an external encrypted hard drive and any individual will be identified by code/pseudonym alone. Any audio recordings will be destroyed at the completion of the analysis.

What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you volunteer to be part of this study, you may withdraw at any point in time, without giving a reason and without detriment to yourself. You may also refuse to answer a particular question and continue to be in the study. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form.

If you decide to withdraw from the process, all physical documents, such as consent form, and any recordings will be shredded and securely destroyed or deleted.

What is the duration of the research?

We expect each of the interviews and observations to last about 45 - 60 minutes.

Where will the research be conducted?

The research will be conducted in your organization or the place that you prefer.

Will the outcomes of the research be published?

The outcome of the interview will contribute to the PhD dissertation and potentially in academic conferences, presentations, and publications with complete preservation of anonymity.

Contact for further information

Should you have any further questions regarding this study, please feel free to contact the researcher or her academic supervisor (contact details are provided below).

Ms. Philaiwan Chompupor (PhD Candidate)

Email: phc10@aber.ac.uk Institute of Business and Law, Aberystwyth University,

Dr. Tiffany Low (Academic Supervisor)

Email: tll1@aber.ac.uk Telephone: 1607 Tel. +44 (0) 152 459 5198



Developing MICE city in Thailand Benchmarking Approach

CONSENT FORM

If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the consent form below

| | Please Initial Box |
|--|---------------------------|
| 1. I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet on the above project and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily. | |
| 2. I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to any treatment/service. | |
| 3. I give my consent to be contacted about the study (by the researcher) if need arise. | |
| 4. I give my permission for the information I have given to be audiotaped, to be photographed, and to be used in the PhD thesis and also later academic conferences and publications with preservation of anonymity. | |
| 5. I understand that the data collected and the recording will be anonymous and stored for future use and viewed only by the interviewer and her supervisors. | |

I agree to take part in the above project

Name of participant

Date

Signature

Name of person taking consent

Date

Signature

Appendix C Interview sample transcription

Interview sample transcript

This is a sample of one of the interviews conducted with an event planner in Phuket city.

Interviewer: So, as I have sent the details about the project and the ideas about the interview which is about developing MICE city. I know you and your association has been involved in the MICE industry recently, isn't it?

Participant: Yes, we are now having an opportunity working with TCEB and stakeholders in the MICE industry, especially in Phuket city. Well, as we know that the MICE industry is very important and has been promoted in many countries even in Thailand a long time ago. Therefore, now it is like we try to learn and modify our policy in order to serve the MICE market.

Interviewer: How long time have you been taking this situation serious?

Participant: Not really long time ago, well since TCEB really put an effort which it a few years ago really. We know and understand that the MICE industry is very important but since Phuket is very well know and everybody knows what they do very well even without the MICE industry. Saying this, I am not even sure how many stakeholders in Phuket know and understand that Phuket has been promoted as one of the MICE cities in Thailand. To be honest I am not sure if the locals know that the city has been called a MICE city of Thailand as they are used to seeing tourists around anyway.

Interviewer: So, you think they still lack awareness of MICE city?

Participant: I would say yes, there is still a lot of work to do in order to make them understand and interested in the MICE industry. As I said Phuket is already well-know and the business here very good with what they do.

Interviewer: Do you agree that Phuket should be one of a MICE city in Thailand then?

Participant: Absolutely, as Phuket has everything the MICE traveller needed, such as faction rooms, workers who know English, and of Couse we have many tourist attractions and activities. However, maybe not only 5 MICE cities that should be promote as a MICE city as anywhere could be a MICE city really. For example, Krabi or Hadyai or Chiang Rai since they all have the potential to be a host city.

Interviewer: What factors you think need to be considered in order to be a MICE city

Participant: There are many aspects to think about really. Firstly, of all transportation, as it was very important to bring people into the destination the transportation should be excellent. I know we have an international airport which is very good but not only air transportation but also local transportation. Phuket still needs to sort out about the public transportation system really. Many people complained about many issues such as lack of standard of fair, time table not accurate, taxi is very expensive, and also traffic jam in the peak hours. I think the local government was now working on the traffic system hopefully it will be better soon.

Secondly, a clearer policy and strategy from stakeholders both private and public sectors. I thin to succeed in developing Phuket as a MICE city; we all need to work together. Well repeating this before creating policies or strategies, they need to understand what MICE city is. TCEB has been very helpful as they always have a meeting and a training course for us. We have more opportunities to meet and discuss more and this could be an excellent start to learn really.

Nevertheless, communication or networking between stakeholders within the city is very important. We should always share information and work together as teamwork even without the TCEB meeting. Not only in the city but also working and sharing with the other 4 MICE cities would be a benefit for Thailand. As all the MICE cities have are different with a unique characteristic. Phuket has many beautiful beaches which could quickly attracted the MICE traveller.

On the other hand, Chiang Mai has a Lanna culture and also natural mountains which could also good with MICE groups. Khon Kaen may not have a tourist attraction but they always created an event in order to invited people to visit the city. So, I do not think about why we could not work together and target different market groups.

Interviewer: Do you think sharing and working together with all the MICE cities in Thailand will be possible?

Participant: I do not see them as a competitor personally but I understand some people might think differently, as well as a natural of Thai people that we have trust issues. However, I think since TCEB goes around and helps us all so working together under the lead of TCEB might be works.

Interviewer: So, TCEB is very important, and in order to convince people to participant in MICE city development then?

Participant: Yes, we now very much depend on TCEB and TCEB strategy as we try to follow the guidelines form TCEB. For example, TCEB has a plan to have an international event such as Amway last year in Phuket they are almost 12,000 people visited Phuket. TCEB helped us to prepared the city by provided criteria and a list of what we should prepare to be ready for the events.

Interviewer: what about bidding, did you have many chances to join a bidding process?

Participant: I do not think we ever have a chance to join any bidding. As I understand, the customer always has plan in their mind so the bidding process might not be that important. I do not know...

Interviewer: Do you think knowing how to win bidding would be useful?

Participant: I am sure it will be very helpful if we know how to prepare a proposal for a bid and have experience in the bidding process. So, in the future, we do not have to wait for TCEB.

Interviewer: I understand that workers in tourism and hospitality in Phuket are familiar with people from all over the world and they have no problem speaking English but do you think this is enough for them or are there any skills that they should improve in order to work in the MICE industry?

Participant: Knowing English and very confident with a foreigner is a strangeness of workers in Phuket. However, working in a MICE traveller is different from a leisure traveller. I used to assume that people who have been working in the tourism industry could efficiently work in the MICE industry, but I have realized there are some particular skills that we require for the MICE workers, especially in an exhibition. Some specific skills required more for the MICE group such as business negotiation, sales, and project management and so on. I think workers still need more experience and learn more about this as MICE is still barely new for them. But I am glad that now the Phuket college now has added the MICE operation and management subject. This will help us a lot... as my company always has a trainee student from a hotel and tourism school and most of the time we offer them a job afterword. Therefore, have a student who knows about the MICE subject before start working will be very helpful.

Interviewer: what about a short training course for MICE, is it could be a solution?

Participant: Yes, that what we all do now. TCEB always provided a training course that useful for workers in MICE such as coach for the coacher and I find it very helpful.

Interviewer: Do you think Phuket need to promote the city in order to attract MICE traveller

Participant: Not really necessary as I said Phuket is already well-known long before the MICE industry and TCEB appeared, due to the excellent beaches and sea resorts. Subsequently, the brand of the city or the name of the city does not to be promoted. I think we just have to be prepared on the infrastructure and our people which included local authority, business sector, workers, and also residents to be aware of the MICE industry and MICE traveller.

Interviewer: So, you think MICE city should have tourist attractions in order to invite more people?

Participant: Definitely as people need to relax after the meeting or work. Therefore, the places that they could visit will be needed. Also, entrainment or an activity.

Interviewer: Thank you for all the information and your time. I hope we will have an opportunity to work together in the future.

Participant: I am sure we will as I have met many lecturers from many universities in many meeting and conference that arranged by TCEB.

Interviewer: Yes, we will absolutely, thank you very much.

Participant: Thank you