Post-pandemic MICE digitalization development: A strategy for sustainable tourism in Bali

Ni Made Rosita Dewi 1*, Gede Sri Darma 2

^{1,2} Universitas Pendidikan Nasional Denpasar, Indonesia

Abstract: The worldwide COVID-19 pandemic has forced numerous businesses to a standstill, with the tourism sector, especially the Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) sector, facing severe challenges. However, this unprecedented situation highlights the unpredictable nature of crises and their potential to reshape travel patterns. This research examines the factors contributing to the success of the digitalization strategy in the MICE industry and explores the impact of digitalization on the industry's pursuit of sustainable tourism goals. The research employs a detailed and all-encompassing examination of the subject, utilizing a case study research methodology in conjunction with a qualitative descriptive research strategy. Data collection involves observation, literature analysis, and interviews conducted with participants in the tourism industry and management of MICE companies. The findings suggest significant potential for Bali as a MICE destination. Digitalization is identified as a pivotal factor in enhancing the future resilience of the MICE industry by creating new prospects, tackling industry challenges, and promoting sustainable event tourism.

Keywords: digitalization, MICE industry, tourism, sustainability

History Article: Submitted 21 November 2023 | Revised 7 June 2024 | Accepted 27 June 2024

How to Cite: Dewi, N. M. R., & Darma, G. S. (2024). Post-pandemic MICE digitalization development: A strategy for sustainable tourism in Bali. *International Journal of Applied Sciences in Tourism and Events, 8*(1), 45-54, http://dx.doi.org/10.31940/ijaste.v8i1.45-54.

Introduction

The global pandemic in 2020, known as Covid-19, had far-reaching consequences on a global scale. Apart from causing health crises, it inflicted severe damage on the world economy since its initial identification in Wuhan, China (Muhyiddin, 2020). Due to various restrictions on community activities, numerous businesses have temporarily halted their operations as the virus continues to spread. Stringent travel restrictions have been implemented in all areas affected by Covid-19, aiming to significantly impede the virus's transmission (Suksmonohadi & Indira, 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic has left a considerable impact worldwide, affecting numerous countries, including Indonesia. Key sectors such as transportation, travel, accommodation, and food services have borne the brunt of the crisis, with the country's tourism industry also taking a substantial hit (Tusianti, 2020). The apprehension of travellers due to the pandemic has led to a notable decline in bookings and a reduction in the number of foreign visitors, as reported by the Central Bureau of Statistics. The data presented in the table below outlines the decrease in foreign visitor arrivals to Bali from 2018 to 2021.

Table 1. Foreign tourist visits to Bali in 2018-2021

Month	2018	2019	2020	2021
January	358 065	451 708	533 392	10
February	452 423	436 266	358 929	12
March	492 678	441 707	166 388	3
April	516 777	476 10 4	273	9
May	528 512	483 928	34	8
June	544 550	549 483	10	1
July	624 366	604 310	16	0

^{*}Corresponding Author: rositadewi.ofc@gmail.com

August	573 766	602 457	12	0
September	555 903	589 984	8	0
October	517 889	565 966	7	2
November	406 725	492 904	2	6
December	498 819	544 726	127	0
Bali	6 070	6 239	1 059	51
	473	543	198	J1
Growth	12.58	2.79	-83.02	-100.00

The data presented in the Table 1, indicates a significant decline in visitor numbers, with a negative visit count of -83.02 in 2020 and a positive figure of -100.00 in 2021. This decline has notably affected the MICE (Meeting, Incentive, Convention, Exhibition) industry, given its direct connection to the broader slowdown in the travel and tourism sector. The MICE sector within the travel industry has emerged as a crucial element in the global tourism system, playing a substantial role in the development of travel destinations and the generation of employment, revenue, and investment (Susanto, 2021). This industry consists of multi-sectors of hospitality services, catering, souvenir companies, printing, travel agencies, transportation, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) (Kusuma, 2019).

Throughout 2020, MICE business managers in Indonesia experienced cancellations and delays, as a result the MICE industry suffered losses of 44.3 trillion in 2020 and 18 trillion during January - April 2021. This is the impact of not implementing 90% of exhibition activities as part of the MICE industry due to restrictions on activities by the government and the weakening purchasing power of the global community related to the Covid-19 pandemic (Susanto, 2021). Taken from Bank Indonesia data sources, it reveals that this has had an impact on the economic slowdown in Bali of -1.14 percent, including the deepest in Indonesia because Bali relies heavily on the tourism and MICE sectors (Indra Junita & Syafganti, 2022).

Hence, to generate revenue amid the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, MICE industry managers must devise effective strategies. Notably, the adoption of virtual and hybrid events has become a prominent trend in this period. Many organizations are currently opting for virtual arrangements to conduct their activities in the midst of the pandemic. The Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy of the Republic of Indonesia emphasizes that special attention will be given to the MICE sector as preparations are made for the transition to the new normal. Therefore, activity organizers can also use the digital concept, namely in a hybrid manner at events by integrating virtual (online) events with face-to-face (offline) events (Mareta, 2021). This can certainly be implemented by holding virtual & hybrid events, event organizers can reduce environmental impacts, reduce the number of trips that have an impact on gas emissions from transportation, paperless, reduce non-degradable waste and food waste. The event industry's understanding of sustainability commonly merges corporate social responsibility with the concept of survival. The COVID-19 pandemic has reshaped the idea of "Sustainability as Survive" (Mair & Smith, 2021). Dodds (2022) study indicates that organizers frequently overlook sustainability, considering it unimportant, thereby intensifying the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

To achieve sustainable event tourism, this research aims to formulate a plan for MICE digitization and to inspire individuals involved in events collaborating with tourism stakeholders to enhance their comprehension of environmental values and promote sustainable practices in the forthcoming years (Dodds et al., 2022). The study encompasses participants such as event organizers and key figures in the tourism industry, specifically those from the public and private sectors, academia, entities and communities, and MICE company management. The primary inquiry in this investigation revolves around the means to propel the digitization of MICE to promote sustainable tourism.

Methodology

To delve deeply into the topics under investigation, encompassing events and various actions to gather comprehensive and qualitative data, this study adopts a case study research methodology as outlined by Baxter and Jack (2008). Employing data triangulation through

observation, interviews, and document analysis techniques is instrumental in obtaining a nuanced perspective. The qualitative research approach is chosen for its capacity to provide a comprehensive and insightful portrayal, aligning with the study's objectives. In this inquiry, researchers examined the data employing thematic analysis. Thematic analysis can be used in analyzing data that aims to find a pattern or theme through the data that has been collected in research (Braun & Cklarke, 2006). This analysis technique is one of the effective methods for indepth and detailed analysis of data to get important themes in research.

Qualitative data is done through data collection, analysis, then interpreted. This study also discusses the general description of the object of research which includes: This study encompasses an examination of MICE tourism in Bali, the evolution of MICE digitalization in response to potential future crises and their impacts, and a plan for advancing sustainable event tourism. In determining the appropriate informants for the study, the researcher used a purposive sampling technique to select participants based on their unique characteristics or experiences with the phenomenon under investigation (Cooper & Schindler, 2011).

The research utilized both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data, as defined by Gupta & Gupta (2022), refers to information directly obtained from the study subject using methods such as surveys, interviews, and firsthand observation, which involves on-site research. The source of information in this research is the Management of MICE Companies in Bali and tourism stakeholders through a semi-structured in-depth interview process. Open-ended questions were used to provide flexibility and facilitate more in-depth follow-up questions on the development of MICE digitization. The transcribed interview data will be processed to identify key themes through a coding process. Once identified, the themes will be evaluated to determine their relevance to the research objectives. In addition to interviews, data collection was conducted through direct observation using participant observation techniques. Researchers collect data by directly observing the company or location of activities and are actively involved or present in the observed environment.

Secondary data refers to pre-existing information collected by external parties or previous investigators for alternative objectives. It is disseminated by entities or individuals not directly involved in the research. In simpler terms, secondary data encompasses information that was acquired and analyzed by other entities or individuals (Gupta & Gupta, 2022). Valuable reservoirs of secondary data include books, journals, the internet, and literature reviews. The secondary data utilized in this study comprises books, records, and reports about company events, along with other literature relevant to the research.

Results and Discussions Results

Advancements in information and communication technology have profoundly influenced various aspects of life, with notable effects on travel and business events. The MICE (Meeting, Incentive, Convention, and Exhibition) sector stands out as a domain undergoing substantial transformation, emerging as a prominent space for conferences, business meetings, exhibitions, and incentives. In the MICE context, the advent of digitalization has brought about substantial changes in event management, offering opportunities for enhanced sustainability. Digitalization of MICE creates new opportunities for businesses, as digital technologies are not used as a temporary solution, but rather as a means to enhance the event experience and expand business potential (Dragin-Jensen et al., 2022; Lekgau & Tichaawa, 2022; Hofstädter-Thalmann et al., 2022). The integration of MICE digitalization in business sustainability and resilience strategies not only provides environmental benefits but also has the potential to increase operational efficiency and flexibility in the face of crisis. The following outlines the development of MICE digitalization to drive future sustainable practices.

MICE Digitalization Development

The primary strategy for companies to revive MICE activities during times of crisis is to find solutions to current challenges. The key to survival for companies in such times lies in their

ability to adapt and innovate by leveraging existing potentials. In the MICE industry, several factors influence the development of digitalization:

1. Innovation

To confront and endure crisis situations in the contemporary era of globalization and technological advancement, the MICE industry must implement a digital transformation strategy. Mohanty et al.'s research in 2020 suggests that technology is expected to play a pivotal role in the future of the tourism industry. This indicates that forecasts of technological dominance in the travel industry, particularly in MICE, are not novel. However, the Covid-19 scenario has accelerated the digital potential extensively, leading MICE participants to show increased interest in understanding the advantages of digital transformation in event design, specifically focusing on the utilization of virtual and hybrid approaches.

2. Human Resources

Skilled and well-trained human resources with in-depth knowledge of various MICE digital platforms are essential for the successful digitization of the MICE industry. Post-pandemic, there is a critical need to adapt event-organizing teams to new technologies and digital processes. Assistance in training is essential to enhance skills and competencies in overseeing and navigating digital technology, a critical aspect for efficiently handling virtual and hybrid events, facilitating a swift adjustment to technical elements (Priyatmoko, 2022).

3. Software & hardware utilization

High-quality software and supporting hardware are essential for developing and utilizing a well-integrated MICE platform. This platform incorporates features like video conferencing, virtual exhibition halls, and online collaboration tools, collectively providing a comprehensive digital MICE experience. Employing digital events offers numerous advantages, such as improved accessibility, cost-effectiveness, audience expansion, long-term sustainability, and a reduction in carbon emissions due to fewer attendees or individuals not requiring travel.

Based on a study by Remmel (2021), around 74% of people favor virtual meetings over face-to-face ones. Furthermore, as reported by Olson (2020) and Young (2021), 93% of professionals in the event industry express a preference for prioritizing virtual events in the future. This emphasizes the importance of event planners having technological skills.

Virtual and hybrid events represent the latest evolution in MICE gatherings, offering significant advantages for enterprises in this sector and playing a pivotal role in its expansion. In contrast to conventional event formats, virtual events are asserted to be more cost-effective, easily accessible, capable of reaching a broader audience, and environmentally sustainable (Hofstädter-Thalmann et al., 2022).

In Bali, virtual and hybrid events are already being implemented. This has been developed as an important strategy to increase resilience in the MICE industry. MICE digitization not only acts as a crisis solution, but can also be a sustainable strategy to improve the efficiency and impact of future events. As such, digitization is a valuable investment for businesses in the face of future uncertainty. Based on data obtained from one of the MICE companies in Bali, PT Melali MICE has adopted virtual and hybrid events as a corporate strategy to capitalize on opportunities in dealing with crises and adapting in an ever-evolving environment. This event data was obtained from the period 2020 to 2023.

Table 2. Virtual & hyrbid event list PT Melali MICE, Bali

Year	Type of Event	Venue
2023	Hybrid	Ayana Resort Hotel, Jimbaran Bali
2023	Hybrid	Prime Plaza Sanur Hotel
2022	Hybrid	The Mulia Hotel and Resort, Nusa Dua Bali
2022	Hybrid	The Stones Hotel Legian, Bali
	2023 2023 2022	Event 2023 Hybrid 2023 Hybrid 2022 Hybrid

International Association of Deposit Insurers Conference	2022	Hybrid	The Westin Resort Nusa Dua, Bali
International Federation of Purchasing and Supply Management World Summit	2022	Hybrid	The Stones Hotel Legian, Bali
G20 Ministerial Meeting on Education	2022	Hybrid	The Hilton Bali Resort
G20 Ministerial Conference on Womens Empowerment (MCWE)	2022	Hybrid	Sofitel Bali Nusa Dua
Representative Office of Bank Indonesia Bali's National Webinar	2022	Virtual	Studio Bank Indonesia Provinsi Bali
Southeast Asia Internet Governance Forum (SEA-IGF)	2021	Hybrid	The Westin Resort Nusa Dua, Bali
Genbest Socialization Forum	2021	Hybrid	Toya Devasya, Bali
Organizing The PUPR Infrastructure Development Exhibition	2021	Virtual	Studio PT Melali MICE
Simakrama Bali 2020 in Klungkung and Singaraja Regency	2020	Hybrid	Kerthagosa Klungkung Singaraja

Table 2 shows that event organizers are able to switch from physical to virtual or hybrid events more quickly and efficiently when crisis situations occur. This allows event organizers to maintain business continuity and continue to host events even with different formats and will continue to be utilized today. Digitalization can strengthen MICE resilience by improving event accessibility, efficiency and flexibility. It also helps the MICE industry to adapt to changes in the global environment, including emergency situations such as pandemics, so that it remains relevant and can thrive in the future. Some of the factors that support the implementation of MICE digitization include the availability of adequate technological infrastructure, such as fast and stable internet connections, wireless networks, and sophisticated hardware. Moreover, effectively overseeing digital platforms and systems that facilitate MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) events necessitates a comprehension of both digital and human resources expertise.

Sustainable Event

Ensuring the sustainability of the tourism industry is a paramount element in the management of tourist sites. Every MICE organization should be founded on the principle of sustainability across various aspects of its operations, considering the limitations imposed by diverse resources. The application of the sustainability event concept aims to expand the positive impact of organizing MICE. Sustainable tourism has three main components included in it, namely the environment, economy, social and culture to fully embrace the concept of sustainability in the MICE sector, it is essential to garner support from diverse quarters, encompassing community members and stakeholders in tourism. To ensure the continuity of activities amid the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, organizers have adeptly replaced conventional offline events with digital alternatives. While the pandemic has forced event organizers to innovate and find new ways to organize events, one of which is by utilizing digital technology. This creates an opportunity to implement sustainable practices in events. Along with the increasing awareness of sustainability issues and the impact of the pandemic, sustainability events are gaining popularity and becoming a focus in organizing events in the future. This is a positive trend that supports the shift towards more sustainable and environmentally-friendly business practices.

To uphold the principles of sustainable development, events should strike a balance between economic, social, and environmental objectives, employing strategies that maximize positive outcomes while minimizing negative impacts (Nawarathna, 2021). The practice of economic sustainability is of course to ensure that MICE can contribute to improving the regional economy, support for local businesses such as MSMEs and vendors in the local area. Promoting economic growth, sustainable events contribute to local businesses, encourage collaboration, and generate a fair and equitable economic influence. In addition, the practice of social sustainability is closely related to community welfare. Socially sustainable MICE will ensure beneficial effects for human resources in the area where the event is held.

Achieving social sustainability initiatives requires a delicate equilibrium between social and economic fairness. The company will consider external impacts on local communities along with internal impacts on workers and stakeholders. Environmental sustainability practices involve making decisions on the use of environmentally friendly products by implementing the following:

- a) Use of eco-friendly materials
- b) Waste management, such as the reduction of materials that produce scraps such as plastic paper and so on.
 - c) Use of materials that can be used repeatedly

This can be realized with the support of various parties, including event providers, related stakeholders and the community. In general, government regulations also affect the implementation of these environmental sustainability practices, so synergy is needed from MICE managers with government programs to realize environmentally friendly MICE.

Discussions

MICE Tourism Bali

Bali stands as a well-liked destination for tourists in Indonesia, drawing attendees for MICE events, both locally and internationally, alongside being a favored spot for leisure travel. Since 2010, Bali has always topped 15 other MICE destinations in the country. In 2017, Bali earned the distinction of being recognized as the leading tourism destination globally by TripAdvisor, surpassing renowned places such as London, Paris, Rome, New York, Crete, Barcelona, Siem Reap, Prague, and Phuket (Delen, K., 2023). There are many reasons why Bali is a popular venue for MICE. Kemenparekraf/Baparekraf RI (2021) states that the implementation of MICE in Bali has great potential, given the local culture that provides its own charm. Moreover, Bali has established a favorable global reputation and holds the position of being the foremost destination for leisure worldwide.

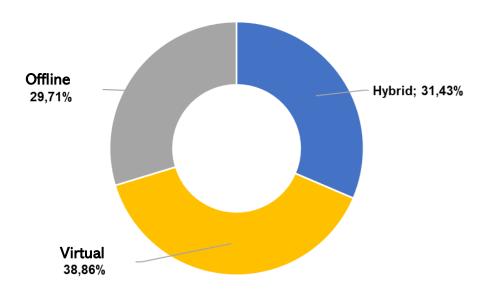
MICE, as a significant driving factor in the advancement of tourist destinations, consistently extends invitations to Bali for hosting diverse international gatherings and events. These encompass major music festivals, the ASEAN Summit, the Miss World pageant, and the IMF World Bank. As a meeting destination, the main locations in Bali are Nusa Dua, Jimbaran, Kuta, Sanur, Ubud, and even up to Kintamani and Bedugul. Often the meeting program is held side-event in the form of incentive travel programs such as outbound or team building, CSR, tourist attraction visits, or even combined with adventure tourism. Incentive trips in Bali in the form of outbound, outings, and gatherings are also packed with various activities and varying durations following the planned goals and themes.

As a popular tourist destination for MICE activities, there are factors that make Bali an attractive destination for many companies and organizations to hold meetings, conferences, incentives and exhibitions. Bali is famous for its natural beauty, such as white sandy beaches, terraced rice fields, volcanoes and tropical forests. This beautiful natural backdrop provides a soothing and alluring atmosphere, which can enhance the experience of MICE participants. Bali's well-developed MICE infrastructure includes modern convention centers and meeting rooms, as well as a wide variety of accommodations equipped with meeting and convention facilities. In addition, Bali's unique and rich culture such as dances, arts, and customs traditions as well as the hospitality of the Balinese people provide a positive experience for MICE participants. The rapid growth in this industry is a result of the efforts of government and private stakeholders to develop adequate MICE infrastructure, accommodation and facilities. In Indonesia, the government has implemented a comprehensive digital transformation policy, focusing on three main areas: infrastructure development, technological advancement, and the nurturing of digital talent. Furthermore, regulations have been enacted regarding Sustainable Tourism Destination Guidelines, which serve as a framework for diverse stakeholders, encompassing both central and local governments, in directing their endeavors toward fostering sustainable tourism destinations. This creates valuable research prospects for understanding the impacts of Bali's MICE sector on social, economic, and environmental aspects.

The Importance of Digitalization in the MICE Industry

The undeniable connection between Indonesia's MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) sector and the global COVID-19 pandemic has halted business activities, impacting all facets of the economy, including meetings, incentives, and exhibits. As reported by the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA), out of the 13,252 events planned for 2020, only 4,843 were realized. Yuniati et al. (2022) estimated potential losses of nearly 3.95 billion rupiah, posing a significant threat of harm to both event organizers and participants. Data from GIPI Bali (2020) suggests possible losses of USD 9 billion, equivalent to over IDR 140 trillion (based on an exchange rate of IDR 15,639), which could adversely affect Bali's tourism industry in both the leisure and MICE sectors. To mitigate the adverse impacts of crises, MICE participants are driven to explore strategies for crisis management. Individuals within the MICE industry must, therefore, maintain resilience in the face of challenges. "Resilience" denotes a system's capability to absorb shocks and adapt accordingly. Resilience is perceived from two perspectives: it involves the ability to return to pre-crisis conditions and serves as a tool for learning and innovation (Chowdhury et al., 2019). In the MICE context, resilience pertains to the ability to sustain services during emergency situations (Burnard et al., 2018; Do et al., 2022).

A survey conducted by the Indonesia Event Industry Council (IVENDO) of 235 respondents from event organizing companies and freelancers and event professionals stated that most of the platforms used in event activities during the COVID-19 pandemic chose virtual and hybrid platforms compared to offline events.



(Source: based on data IVENDO Bali (2020)) **Figure 1.** Survey results of event platform usage during the Covid-19 pandemic

Figure 1 above show that digitalization with virtual & hybrid formats is a great potential in maintaining the resilience of the MICE industry, with this event format allowing organizers to quickly switch to virtual and hybrid formats in emergency situations such as a pandemic. With this technology, events can continue without having to cancel them. In addition, digitization provides flexibility in designing events according to needs, allowing organizers to more easily adapt to changes in the business and technology environment.

Technology not only enhances operational efficiency but also advances sustainability principles. The prevailing direction in cultural tourism in Bali emphasizes sustainable development, integrating strategies for tourism development that optimize local creativity, economic considerations, and community involvement to establish sustainable tourism destinations (Ginaya et al., 2019; Astuti et al., 2019). This enterprise in the sustainable sector aligns with the policies

of the World Tourism Aligned with the World Tourism Organization (WTO), this type of tourism operates as a means of sustainable, enduring business expansion. This proves that tourism can be a solution to the problems of socio-cultural and ecological aspects in the future (Ginaya et al, 2023). The new theoretical foundation in the development of MICE digitization involves identifying how digital technology can be applied to various aspects of MICE, including event management. It also integrates the concept of sustainable tourism within the MICE context. The utilization of digital technology in MICE can support sustainable tourism principles, such as the use of environmentally friendly materials, effective waste management, energy efficiency, and community participation.

This has significant implications for stakeholders in developing effective and efficient digitization strategies for sustainable business practices. These implications include event management strategies that positively impact the economy through collaboration and cooperation, as well as support for local entrepreneurs and vendors who possess the necessary quality, capability, and knowledge for event needs. Social sustainability practices are closely linked to the well-being of society, ensuring that a socially sustainable MICE will have beneficial effects on the human resources in the event's locality. Environmental sustainability practices involve making decisions that favor the use of eco-friendly products. Sustainability not only influences how MICE activities are organized but also enhances business resilience during crises, creates an enabling environment, and encourages the development of MICE digitization strategies. Consequently, this provides maximum benefits in supporting industry growth and sustainability.

Conclusions

Drawing on the research results, it can be asserted that Bali holds significant potential as a MICE destination. The presence of diverse supporting elements, encompassing infrastructure, scenic landscapes, cultural allure, and ample conference and accommodation facilities, positions Bali to evolve into a comprehensive hub for various MICE events. The significance of digitization in transforming the paradigm of the MICE business has become increasingly sustainable in the era of globalization and the repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic, which have impacted the entire world, including Bali's MICE industry. Digital technology has presented new opportunities and overcome several challenges in the MICE industry. Digitalization is a powerful tool to drive the MICE industry towards sustainability. With wise use and responsiveness to emerging challenges, digitalization can help create a more efficient, sustainable and environmentally friendly MICE industry, which provides great benefits for companies, event participants and the environment. One important finding is that digitization has opened up greater accessibility in the MICE industry. Previously, events requiring physical presence can now be conducted digitally, reducing the energy and aviation footprint on the environment. Technology can be employed in event management to reduce environmental impact, minimize waste, and optimize resource utilization. Objectives related to the economy, society, and environment should all be harmonized when advocating for sustainable practices.

Several suggestions can be proposed to act as a standard for implementing MICE digitalization to advance sustainable practices. These recommendations encompass community backing, crucial for nurturing sustainable digitalization, and partnerships between MICE industry players and tourism stakeholders. Cooperative endeavors can yield more efficient and enduring solutions. In addition, MICE players or event organizers need to be provided with training to understand and implement digitalization wisely. This will help overcome barriers to digital technology adoption as an important strategy to increase resilience in the MICE industry in the face of uncertainty and possible future crises.

Although this research has implications for the tourism industry and its managers, it is limited by its narrow focus on stakeholder behavior regarding sustainability implementation, constrained by the limited scope of the objects studied. Future research should consider how the support of tourism stakeholders can influence the implementation of sustainability in the MICE industry, providing more detailed explanations and incorporating more comprehensive theoretical foundations. Additionally, future studies should explore a broader range of event stakeholders, including participants, government organizations, and the community.

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