



## POST-PANDEMIC VIRTUAL MICE ACTIVITIES

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### ABSTRACT

*The COVID-19 pandemic has led to social restrictions and the spread of the virus, affecting in-person gatherings and resulting in changes in the world of the tourism industry, particularly in the MICE sector, which has shifted to virtual events. The MICE industry itself encompasses organizers and suppliers who manage and deliver all aspects of an event. Professional MICE events comprise several aspects of large-scale gatherings, such as travel agencies, creative design services, catering, marketing, and logistics. MICE is a business activity that can provide benefits, especially in the tourism sector. In this study, MICE activities are analyzed from the perspective of virtual events using a literature review research method, which is a qualitative research approach that gathers data from various sources. The results of this research have revealed a new innovation in the form of virtual MICE activities, which have received both positive and negative responses from the public due to considerations of the positive and negative impacts of virtual MICE activities on society.*

**Keywords :** Activity; MICE Virtual; Post pandemic

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### I. INTRODUCTION

MICE (Meeting, Incentive, Conference, and Exhibition) is a business activity that can provide significant benefits, particularly in the tourism sector. This activity often involves large-scale gatherings, ranging from national to international events, which are typically centered around a specific theme or industry. The MICE industry encompasses both organizers and suppliers who manage and deliver all aspects of an event. Professional MICE events consist of several components related to large-scale meetings, such as travel agencies, creative design services, catering, marketing, and logistics. MICE activities include meetings, incentive travel, conferences, and exhibitions, each of which serves a distinct purpose:

- a. Meeting: According to The International Association of Professional Congress Organizers, a meeting involves a group of people gathering in one place to conduct an activity that can be one-time or recurring. This can include corporate events and academic meetings.
- b. Incentive Travel: Incentive travel is an activity where companies reward employees with trips as a token of appreciation for their excellent performance. Typically, the HR



- department offers various incentives to improve employee relations, cooperation, boost morale, and ultimately enhance productivity.
- c. Conferences: Conferences are meetings with a broader network and a clear primary objective of information exchange. Organizing conferences involves in-depth planning, including travel arrangements, meetings, and various events.
  - d. Exhibitions: Exhibitions are a part of conferences and meetings where companies showcase their products or services based on a specific theme. These are most commonly seen in the fields of technology and the arts, with the goal of promoting and displaying products or services to potential customers or business partners.

MICE activities also encompass various ceremonial events involving a large number of people, such as product launches, awards ceremonies, sports competitions, training sessions, and more. Although their activities vary greatly, there is a concern about the decline in MICE activities. In addition to technological advancements, this industry is quite susceptible to sensitive issues (Abdullah, 2017).

MICE activities can provide economic benefits, promote tourism, facilitate business networking, and contribute to industry development. MICE often play a crucial role in the growth of the tourism and convention sectors of a city or country, providing opportunities for knowledge exchange and collaboration among professionals. Supported by preparations related to facilities, conference spaces, and supporting services, the MICE industry becomes highly potential for the tourism industry (Muljadi & Warman, 2016).

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to social restrictions and the spread of the virus, affecting in-person meetings. By conducting MICE events virtually, the risk of virus transmission can be minimized, ensuring the safety and health of participants, visitors, and staff. Many other positive impacts arise from virtual MICE during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as reduced travel limitations, increased flexibility and accessibility, enhanced interaction and technology utilization, and cost savings. However, it is important to note that virtual MICE cannot always fully replace the in-person experience. Some aspects, like direct physical interaction, informal networking, and the atmosphere of an event, cannot be entirely replicated in virtual settings. Therefore, in some specific situations, in-person MICE events may still be necessary even after the pandemic subsides.

## **METHOD**

This study employs a descriptive method. This approach is used to explain the conditions that occur when discussing cause-and-effect issues (Kasim et al., 2020). It is a qualitative research method that gathers data from various sources, such as several national and international journals, articles from previous research with similar themes, which the author has analyzed in relation to the issue under investigation in this study (Sugiyono, 2018). An analytical descriptive method is used, involving the identification, collection, organization, and analysis of various data obtained.

## **II. RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **Background of Virtual MICE Activities**

MICE, as one of the tourism activities, faced significant challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic due to restrictions and social distancing measures. The pandemic had a detrimental impact on the tourism industry, including the MICE sector. According to data from the Indonesian Event Industry Council (Ivendo), in 2017, the MICE industry contributed significantly to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), generating approximately 7.8 billion US

dollars and creating job opportunities for up to 280,000 people. However, the situation has reversed during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the MICE sector suffering losses estimated at 2.69 billion US dollars or around 6.94 trillion Indonesian rupiah.

To address this urgent situation, the MICE industry innovated with virtual applications to host virtual exhibitions. This innovation generated mixed responses from the public, as virtual exhibitions were seen as unconventional and challenging to implement. For example, Iqbal Alan Abdullah, the Chairman of the Indonesian Congress Comfort Association (INCCA), expressed doubts about conducting exhibitions online, emphasizing the importance of offline exhibitions to make visitors aware of products directly.

Virtual exhibitions have become a trend in Indonesia, with various events demonstrating extensive development in virtual technology usage, especially during the pandemic. For instance, a performance in October 2020, organized by artist and director Rama Soeprapto and supported by the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, focused on preserving folk tales and folklore. The Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy strongly supported the use of digital platforms for virtual exhibitions, providing opportunities for experts to create job opportunities. The New Normal Travel Fair 2020, an international virtual exhibition that utilized 3D technology, was the first and largest of its kind in Indonesia. It involved various tourism industry players and was attended virtually by the Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy. This event demonstrated that many activities could be conducted in a virtual environment, including virtual transactions, interactions with customer service, and navigating virtual exhibition halls. It also showcased the potential of information technology advancements in the MICE sector, particularly through Virtual Reality 360.

Virtual Reality (VR) 360, a technology that enables users to interact with simulated computer-generated environments, is widely used in various aspects of daily life, such as games, pilot tests, and virtual tours in the tourism industry. The Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy considered VR 360 as a solution for future travel experiences.

Despite the numerous ideas and innovations surrounding virtual MICE, public sentiment varies, with some in favor and others against the concept. Many argue that virtual MICE does not align with the traditional MICE industry and fails to provide the same level of satisfaction or experience as in-person events. Based on these conditions, it shows that the use of technology in the MICE industry provides easy access, detailed information, and helps enhance organizational credibility. (Darma, 2022).

### **Public Response to Virtual MICE Activities**

The introduction of virtual MICE activities brought a new dimension to people's lives during the pandemic and continues to do so. Public opinion on virtual MICE varies significantly, with both positive and negative perspectives, as it has a significant impact on our lifestyles.

#### **Positive Public Opinion on Virtual MICE:**

- a. **Efficiency:** Many people view virtual MICE activities as more efficient because they require less physical space and have lower associated costs.
- b. **Overcoming Facility Limitations:** Virtual MICE is seen favorably by those who face limitations in their physical facilities. It simplifies the execution of MICE activities.
- c. **Comfort with Digital Environments:** The digital environment has become increasingly comfortable for people, especially during the pandemic when most activities relied on digital knowledge. Changes in marketing have become one form of increased technology usage. The pandemic situation has also altered this model, causing people to become more accustomed to technology (Sugiantara et al., 2023).

### Negative Public Opinion on Virtual MICE:

- a. Ineffectiveness Online: Some argue that virtual MICE activities are ineffective online due to high data usage, signal issues, and a lack of necessary facilities.
- b. Lack of Participant Experience: Virtual MICE activities may lack the immersive experience provided by physical events, particularly for participants.
- c. Possibility of Connectivity Issues: Virtual events are susceptible to network or internet connectivity issues, which can disrupt the event.
- d. Ineffectiveness for B2B MICE: Virtual MICE, especially for business-to-business (B2B) interactions, may not be as effective as in-person meetings, as B2B focuses on establishing connections and meetings beyond just virtual reality.

### Impact of Virtual MICE

The COVID-19 pandemic had far-reaching effects on various sectors, including healthcare, the economy, tourism, culture, education, and more. To prevent the spread of the virus, activities involving gatherings or crowds were restricted or canceled, leading to the development of innovative solutions. Virtual technologies, such as virtual meetings, working from home (WFH), and virtual conferences, gained prominence. Even though the pandemic has subsided, virtual activities continue to be relevant and are widely adopted.

### Positive Impacts of Virtual MICE:

1. Cost Savings: Virtual MICE activities are cost-efficient, as they eliminate expenses related to physical venues, extensive staff, transportation, and catering.
2. Increased Attendance: Proper promotion can attract larger audiences to virtual MICE events, as virtual spaces can accommodate numerous participants with ease.
3. Global Reach: Virtual MICE activities can reach a global audience without the need for international travel, reducing associated costs.
4. Flexible Timing: Virtual events offer flexibility in scheduling, adapting to specific situations and conditions.
5. Environmental Benefits: Virtual MICE activities have a minimal environmental impact compared to physical events, reducing waste, resource consumption, and carbon footprint.
6. Safety and Health: The most significant benefit is the reduced risk of disease transmission. Virtual MICE eliminates the need for extensive travel or large gatherings, safeguarding the health of all participants.

### Negative Impacts of Virtual MICE:

1. Reduced Audience Interaction: Some MICE activities rely on direct interaction with the audience. Virtual events may lack this essential aspect.
2. Lack of Physical Experience: Certain MICE activities require physical participation and cannot be effectively replicated virtually.
3. Connectivity Issues: Reliance on the internet for virtual events can lead to disruptions, affecting the overall experience.
4. Ineffectiveness for Specific MICE Activities: Virtual MICE may not be suitable for activities that prioritize face-to-face interactions, such as B2B engagements.

### III. CONCLUSIONS

The MICE industry encompasses both organizers and suppliers responsible for managing and delivering all aspects of an event. Professional MICE events comprise several components related to large-scale gatherings, including travel agencies, creative design services, catering, marketing, and logistics. MICE activities encompass meetings, incentive travel, conferences, and exhibitions. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in social restrictions and the spread of the virus, which significantly impacted in-person meetings. With social limitations in place, conducting MICE activities became exceedingly challenging. As a response to these challenges, a new innovation emerged - virtual MICE activities. However, this innovation has sparked both positive and negative responses from the public, as people contemplate the potential positive and negative impacts of virtual MICE activities

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