

Strategic Management of MICE Events for Sustainability: Transcending the Cost Paradox toward Social License to Operate

การจัดการเชิงกลยุทธ์ของการจัดงานไมซ์เพื่อความยั่งยืน: การก้าวข้ามความย้อนแย้งด้านต้นทุนมุ่งสู่ฉันทานุมัติจากสังคมในการดำเนินธุรกิจ

Author

Panchamaphorn Tamnanwan, Ph.D., M.A., B.B.A. (First Author) (panchamaphorn.t@ku.th)

Department of Hospitality Innovation and Intercultural Communication,

Faculty of Hospitality Industry, Kasetsart University, Thailand

ORCID ID: 0009-0009-2921-2502  (Corresponding Author)

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Abstract

The primary objective of this research is to examine the current status, barriers, and strategic management of MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, and Exhibitions) events for sustainability in Thailand. It focuses on analyzing the dynamic transition from Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities to a "License to Operate" under the international standard ISO 20121:2024. This study employs a Qualitative Research methodology through In-depth Interviews with 20 key informants, comprising policymakers, venue operators, organizers, and suppliers in the Bangkok Metropolitan Region. The findings reveal that the Thai MICE industry is facing four significant "structural gaps": Policy Disconnect, the Cost Paradox, which undermines the potential of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), Skills Gap, and human rights risks within the supply chain. Based on these findings, the research synthesized the "5-Is Strategic Model" (Intention, Integration, Implementation, Inclusivity, Impact) as a framework to sustainably elevate the competitiveness of the Thai MICE industry onto the global stage. This report provides an exhaustive analysis of these dimensions, integrating theoretical frameworks such as the Resource-Based View (RBV) and Stakeholder Theory to offer a roadmap for industry resilience.

Keywords: Strategic Management; MICE Industry; Sustainability; Social License to Operate; ISO 20121

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์หลักเพื่อศึกษาสถานะปัจจุบัน อุปสรรค และการจัดการเชิงกลยุทธ์ของการจัดงานไมซ์ (MICE) เพื่อความยั่งยืนในประเทศไทย โดยมุ่งเน้นวิเคราะห์การเปลี่ยนผ่านจากกิจกรรมความรับผิดชอบต่อสังคม (CSR) ไปสู่ "ใบอนุญาตทางสังคมในการดำเนินงาน" (Social License to Operate) ภายใต้มาตรฐานสากล ISO 20121:2024 งานวิจัยนี้ใช้วิธีวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพ (Qualitative Research) ผ่านการสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึก (In-depth Interviews) กับผู้ให้ข้อมูลหลักจำนวน 20 ท่าน ซึ่งประกอบด้วยผู้กำหนดนโยบาย ผู้ประกอบการสถานที่จัดงาน ผู้จัดงาน และซัพพลายเออร์ในเขตกรุงเทพมหานครและปริมณฑล ผลการวิจัยพบว่าอุตสาหกรรมไมซ์ของไทยกำลังเผชิญกับ "ช่องว่างเชิงโครงสร้าง" (Structural Gaps) 4 ประการ ได้แก่ ความไม่เชื่อมโยงของนโยบาย (Policy Disconnect), กับดักด้านต้นทุน (Cost Paradox) ซึ่งลดทอนศักยภาพของวิสาหกิจขนาดกลางและขนาดย่อม (SMEs), ช่องว่างทางทักษะ (Skills Gap), และความเสี่ยงด้านสิทธิมนุษยชนในห่วงโซ่อุปทาน จากข้อค้นพบเหล่านี้ งานวิจัยได้สังเคราะห์ "โมเดลกลยุทธ์ 5-Is" (Intention, Integration, Implementation, Inclusivity, Impact) เพื่อเป็นกรอบแนวคิดในการยกระดับขีดความสามารถในการแข่งขันของอุตสาหกรรมไมซ์ไทยสู่เวทีโลกอย่างยั่งยืน โดยบูรณาการแนวคิดฐานทรัพยากร (RBV) และทฤษฎีผู้มีส่วนได้ส่วนเสีย (Stakeholder Theory) เพื่อสร้างความยืดหยุ่นและภูมิคุ้มกันให้กับอุตสาหกรรม

คำสำคัญ: การจัดการเชิงกลยุทธ์; อุตสาหกรรมไมซ์; ความยั่งยืน; ใบอนุญาตทางสังคม; มาตรฐาน ISO 20121

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, the MICE industry (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, and Exhibitions) has proven itself an economic engine, playing a vital role in Thailand's and the world's economic development. It serves as a "strategic platform" for connecting business sectors, exchanging knowledge, and creating cross-industry innovation (Getz, 2008). Data from 2024 indicate that Thailand welcomed over 25.35 million MICE travelers, generating total circulating revenue of 148,341 million THB and a total economic impact of over 309,000 million THB, or approximately 1.67% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). These figures reflect that MICE is not merely a tourism sector, but a key mechanism driving national strategy under the 13th National Economic and Social Development Plan (2023-2027). This plan explicitly aims to position Thailand as a high-quality tourism destination and a regional gateway for trade and investment, shifting focus from quantity to quality and sustainability (Buathong & Lai, 2017).

Despite this strong economic performance, the MICE industry is facing immense pressure from climate change and global demands for sustainability. Organizing large-scale MICE events comes with high "environmental costs," whether it be massive amounts of plastic and food waste, electricity consumption in managing large convention centers, and most importantly, carbon emissions from participant travel, which is a complex and urgent challenge (Hall, 2012). For instance, the carbon footprint associated with international flights for delegates, and the energy-intensive nature of exhibition venues such as IMPACT Muang Thong Thani and the Queen Sirikit National Convention Center (QSNCC), contribute significantly to the sector's greenhouse gas emissions (Boggia et al., 2018).

The most interesting dynamic currently is the Paradigm Shift from an era in which sustainability was merely an "option" or a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activity pursued for corporate image, to an era in which sustainability has become a "License to Operate" (Prno & Slocumbe, 2012). This is a mandatory condition that international corporate clients and investors use when choosing business partners. This change is accelerated by the implementation of the revised international standard ISO 26101:2024, which has expanded the scope of organizer responsibility to cover social dimensions and human rights, and to create a sustainable legacy for the host community (Næss, 2021). The updated standard now requires a systematic approach to "impact and legacy," forcing organizers to consider the long-term effects of their events on local communities and the environment, effectively making sustainability a prerequisite for market entry rather than a differentiator (Pelham, 2011).

Although Thailand is alert and has established national policies aligned with the BCG (Bio-Circular-Green) Economy model, in practice, the industrial sector still suffers from a severe "lack of strategic integration," particularly among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). These entities are stuck in a "Cost Paradox." That is, they perceive the necessity to adapt but cannot bear the incremental costs from sustainable operations, resulting in a disparity in development standards between large and small players (Mair, 2021). While large venues can invest in solar roofs and advanced waste-management systems, smaller organizers and suppliers struggle with the upfront costs of green

certification and eco-friendly materials, creating a bifurcated market in which sustainability becomes a luxury good rather than an industry standard.

Furthermore, a "Policy Disconnect" exists between top-level policies and frontline operations, leading to elegant policies failing to drive actual behavioral change. This phenomenon, often described in institutional theory as "decoupling," occurs when organizations adopt sustainability policies symbolically to satisfy external stakeholders without implementing substantial changes in their daily operations. Frontline staff often view sustainability policies as merely "additional workload" to follow orders, rather than part of the normal work process, resulting in inefficient and unsustainable operations.

1.2 Research Objectives

1.2.1 To understand the dynamics and find solutions for such structural problems, this research sets three objectives as follows:

1.2.2 To study the current status and analyze the strategic management of MICE events for sustainability by operators in Thailand, emphasizing lessons learned from key stakeholders. This involves examining how global standards, such as ISO 20121, are being interpreted and implemented by Thai operators, and identifying gaps between policy intent and operational reality.

1.2.3 To assess the impacts and barriers in sustainability operations, covering economic, social, and environmental dimensions (Triple Bottom Line) ([Andersson & Lundberg, 2013](#)). This objective seeks to quantify the "Cost Paradox" faced by SMEs and uncover hidden social risks, particularly regarding labor rights in the supply chain, which are critical for maintaining the "Social License to Operate" ([Stronge et al., 2024](#)).

1.2.4 To develop a Strategic Management Model suitable for the Thai context that serves as a guideline for elevating sustainable competitiveness. By synthesizing findings into the "5-Is Strategic Model," this research aims to provide actionable frameworks that allow Thai MICE operators to integrate sustainability into their core business strategies, thereby ensuring long-term viability and global competitiveness.

2. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

2.1 Evolution of Sustainability in the MICE Industry

The concept of sustainability in the MICE industry has undergone continuous evolution. From the initial era emphasizing "Green Meetings" from 2009–2012, which focused on technical measures such as reducing paper use and conserving energy ([Boo & Park, 2010](#)), to the current era emphasizing "Sustainable Events" within a broader, more profound framework. Organizing sustainable events today does not merely consider immediate impacts but also the Event Lifecycle and the entire supply chain ([Laing & Frost, 2010](#)).

A significant turning point was the announcement of the ISO 20121: Event Sustainability Management Systems standard, which was most recently updated in 2024. This standard has elevated sustainability from being merely a "Checklist" to a "Management System" that requires systematic planning, doing, checking, and acting (PDCA Cycle) ([Næss, 2021](#)). The 2024 revision of ISO 20121

represents a critical maturation of the standard. Unlike its 2012 predecessor, ISO 20121:2024 explicitly incorporates "human and child rights," "social impact," and "legacy" as core components. It aligns with the Harmonized Structure (HS) for management system standards, facilitating integration with other standards such as ISO 9001 and ISO 14001, and places greater emphasis on supply chain responsibility and climate action.

This evolution reflects a shift from "Green" (environmental focus) to "Sustainable" (holistic ESG focus) (Mokhtar & Deng, 2015). The inclusion of human rights and legacy creation indicates that sustainability in this era must consider "People" alongside "Planet" and "Profit." For the Thai MICE industry, this means that environmental stewardship alone is no longer sufficient; operators must now demonstrate how their events contribute to social equity and leave a positive, lasting footprint on the host community (Buathong & Lai, 2017).

2.2 Resource-Based View (RBV) and Competitive Advantage

This research uses the Resource-Based View (RBV) theory as a framework for analyzing operator potential. This theory proposes that an organization's sustainable competitive advantage arises from possessing and managing internal resources that are Valuable, Rare, Inimitable, and Non-substitutable (VRIN) (Dolasinski & Reynolds, 2025). In the context of MICE, these resources do not mean just capital or luxurious venues, but also include "Intangible Assets" such as knowledge in organizing eco-friendly events, organizational culture that cares for sustainability, and a network of partners in a green supply chain. The ability of operators to integrate sustainability into their core resources will help create Differentiation and allow them to compete on more than price alone.

For example, a MICE operator who possesses deep expertise in carbon footprint calculation and offsetting (a "Rare" and "Valuable" capability) can offer a distinct value proposition to international clients seeking carbon-neutral events (Cheng & Xu, 2023). Furthermore, the RBV framework suggests that for SMEs, who often lack financial resources (tangible assets), the cultivation of intangible assets—such as strong relationships with sustainable suppliers and a flexible, innovative workforce—can serve as a critical lever for overcoming the "Cost Paradox".

2.3 Stakeholder Theory

The success of MICE events depends on the cooperation of a complex network of stakeholders. Stakeholder Theory emphasizes that organizations must create value and respond to the expectations of all related parties, not just shareholders, but including employees, customers, local communities, suppliers, and government agencies. In the modern era, pressure from these stakeholders, especially multinational corporate clients that require ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) reporting, has become a key driver of adaptation for MICE organizers (Draper et al., 2011).

The concept of "Social License to Operate" (SLO) is central to this theory. SLO refers to the ongoing acceptance and approval of an organization's activities by the local community and other stakeholders (Prno & Slocumbe, 2014). Unlike a legal license, which is granted by a government authority, an SLO is intangible and dynamic; it must be earned and maintained through consistent

ethical behavior and engagement (Glückler & Gutiérrez, 2025). Neglecting social dimensions or human rights in the supply chain—such as the exploitation of migrant labor in exhibition construction—can lead to the withdrawal of this social license, resulting in reputational damage, protests, or loss of business (Deery & Jago, 2010). For the Thai MICE industry, maintaining an SLO involves ensuring that the economic benefits of tourism are distributed equitably and that events do not disrupt residents' quality of life (Mair & Duffy, 2015).

3. Research Methodology

This research is designed under the Qualitative Research paradigm as it seeks to understand the complex and abstract phenomenon of sustainability strategies within the specific context of Thai society. The research process emphasizes collecting in-depth data from those with direct experience to obtain knowledge that reflects reality and is actionable.

3.1 Selection of Key Informants

The researcher used Purposive Sampling to select experts and key players in the MICE industry, totaling 20 individuals in Bangkok and the metropolitan area, the central hub of MICE activities in Thailand. The informants were divided into four main groups to cover perspectives from all sectors in the ecosystem:

Policymakers: Senior executives from government agencies like the Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB) and professional associations related to MICE and tourism strategy planning. These informants provided insights into national strategies like the BCG Model and the 13th National Plan.

Venue Operators: Executives of leading convention centers (e.g., QSNCC, IMPACT) and hotels who play a role in managing space and building resources. Their perspectives were crucial to understanding the operational challenges of implementing standards such as ISO 20121.

Organizers: Executives of event organizing companies with experience in designing and managing both national and international MICE projects. They offered insights into client demands and the practical difficulties of balancing sustainability with budget constraints.

Suppliers: Executives of supporting businesses in the supply chain, such as booth construction contractors, food and beverage providers, and logistics. This group provided critical data on the "Cost Paradox" and labor issues within the supply chain.

3.2 Research Instruments and Trustworthiness

The primary research instrument was a Semi-structured Interview Guide. To ensure Content Validity, the interview questions were developed based on an extensive literature review of ISO 20121:2024 and Stakeholder Theory. The draft questions were reviewed by a panel of three academic and industry experts to calculate the Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) Index. Only questions scoring above 0.67 were retained. To enhance Reliability and Trustworthiness (Triangulation), data from in-depth interviews were cross-verified with on-site observations at major MICE venues and secondary qualitative data from organizational sustainability reports.

The main tools used in the research consist of:

Semi-structured Interview Guide: To provide an opportunity for informants to express opinions and share experiences freely on issues of strategy, problems, barriers, and adaptation guidelines. Questions focused on the transition to ISO 20121:2024, the tangible impacts of sustainability mandates, and the "Policy Disconnect" within organizations.

On-site Observation: The researcher visited actual event sites to observe and verify the consistency between policies reported in interviews and frontline practices (Data Triangulation). Observations focused on waste management processes, labor conditions during setup/teardown, and the visibility of sustainability initiatives.

Document Analysis: Studying annual reports, sustainability reports (e.g., from TCEB and major venues), and policy documents to supplement the completeness of the data. This included reviewing the 13th National Economic and Social Development Plan and the details of the BCG Economy Model.

3.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis followed a systematic **Content Analysis** approach using a three-step qualitative protocol:

1. **Open Coding:** Transcribed interview data were analyzed line-by-line to assign initial conceptual codes to emerging segments related to barriers and strategic elements.

2. **Categorization:** Similar codes were axial-coded and grouped into wider descriptive categories (e.g., merging "high material cost" and "low price tolerance" into the "Cost Paradox" category).

3. **Thematic Synthesis:** Categories were synthesized into core themes, which directly formed the four "Structural Gaps" and the components of the "5-Is Strategic Model".

4. Research results

4.1 Current Status: From CSR to License to Operate

The most distinct finding is the change in the status of "sustainability" in the MICE industry. From being just a supplementary activity for image (CSR) or "Nice-to-have," it has become a "fundamental necessity" or "Must-have." Informants unanimously stated that large corporate clients and international events currently clearly stipulate sustainability conditions in their Terms of Reference (TOR). If any operator cannot demonstrate compliance with acceptable environmental or social management standards, they are immediately disqualified from the competition. This situation confirms that sustainability has fully become a "License to Operate" ([Stronge et al., 2024](#)).

A confluence of global and local factors drives this shift. Internationally, the European Union's Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) requires companies to identify and mitigate human rights and environmental risks in their supply chains, thereby affecting Thai operators serving EU clients. Domestically, the Thai government's Bio-Circular-Green (BCG) Economy Model

designates tourism and the creative economy as key sectors for sustainable development and links funding and support to green practices. The updated ISO 20121:2024 standard further codifies these expectations, making "legacy" and "human rights" auditable criteria rather than aspirational goals (Næss, 2021).

4.2 Structural Gaps and Barriers

Despite alertness at the policy level, at the operational level, the research found four significant structural barriers acting as walls blocking the industry's development:

4.2.1 Policy Disconnect

An inconsistency was found between corporate-level policies and frontline operations. Senior executives often have clear and elegant sustainability visions and policies. Still, when these are translated to the operational level, there is a lack of continuity and communication, resulting in a limited understanding. Frontline staff often view sustainability policies as merely "additional workload" to follow orders, rather than part of the normal work process, resulting in inefficient and unsustainable operations. This disconnect illustrates "Institutional Isomorphism," in which organizations adopt the form of sustainability (policies, certifications) to gain legitimacy but fail to integrate its substance into daily routines (Pelham, 2011). For example, while a venue might have a policy for waste separation, on-site observations revealed that janitorial staff, under time pressure and lacking specific training, often combine separated waste streams during disposal. This "decoupling" undermines the credibility of the industry's sustainability claims and risks accusations of "greenwashing". An inconsistency was found between corporate-level policies and frontline operations... As highlighted by an Event Organizer Executive (Informant #07):

"Management signs off on beautiful green policies for the website, but at the venue, the setup crew has 6 hours to tear down. Nobody has time to sort plastic or salvage materials when the penalty for late handover is ticking. It's an operational disconnect."

4.2.2 Cost Paradox

This problem is the biggest obstacle for SME operators in the MICE industry. The "Cost Paradox" is a condition where operators realize that doing business sustainably is necessary in the long term. Still, in the short term, changing processes, using eco-friendly materials, or applying for standard certifications all incur higher costs than traditional operations (Mair & Laing, 2013). Meanwhile, the market remains highly price-competitive, and some customers are not yet ready to pay a premium for sustainability. This leaves SMEs in a dilemma and deters them from investing in change. For instance, biodegradable food packaging can cost 2-3 times as much as plastic alternatives, and the cost of ISO 20121 certification consultancy can be prohibitive for small organizers. While larger entities like IMPACT or QSNCC can amortize these costs over a high volume of events, SMEs face a direct hit to their margins. This creates a "Green Gap," in which only the most prominent players can afford to be certified as "sustainable," potentially crowding out smaller, local businesses from high-value

international contracts. This problem is the biggest obstacle for SME operators... A booth construction supplier (Informant #14) added:

"The international clients want eco-friendly certified materials, but local clients still choose the cheapest bidder. If we invest in expensive reusable modular systems, our quotes become uncompetitive. The market forces us to stay cheap, not green."

4.2.3 Skills Gap

The Thai MICE industry is facing a severe shortage of personnel with specific knowledge, understanding, and skills in sustainability (Green Competencies), such as calculating carbon footprints, managing waste correctly in accordance with circular economy principles, or designing events that reduce environmental impact. This shortage means that, even with good intentions, operators cannot translate policies into effective practice (Mair, 2021). Specific skill deficiencies identified include:

Carbon Accounting: Using tools like the Thailand Voluntary Emission Reduction Program (T-VER) carbon footprint calculator requires technical knowledge that few event planners possess.

Sustainable Supply Chain Management: Selecting and auditing suppliers to ensure compliance with human rights and environmental standards is a complex task that requires specialized training.

Legacy Planning: Designing events to leave a lasting positive social impact requires a shift from logistical planning to strategic community engagement, a skill set not traditionally taught in hospitality or event management curricula (Perry et al., 2020).

4.2.4 Social Risks and Human Rights

The research found that social issues, especially human rights and labor welfare in the supply chain, remain a blind spot. Employment through subcontracting for construction and booth installation often entails safety risks and inappropriate working conditions, which contradict the new ISO 20121:2024 standards, which place great importance on this dimension. Reports highlight that the construction and service sectors in Thailand rely heavily on migrant workers from neighboring countries (Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos), who are often vulnerable to exploitation, including debt bondage, lack of social security, and unsafe working environments. In the MICE context, the intense pressure to set up and dismantle exhibitions in short timeframes can exacerbate safety risks. The upcoming "Act on the Promotion of Responsible Business Conduct" (Thailand's mandatory human rights due diligence law) will soon make it a legal obligation for large operators to police their supply chains for these abuses. Neglecting this issue could become a time bomb, destroy the industry's reputation, and lead to legal sanctions (Saenz, 2019). The research found that social issues remain a blind spot... A venue operational manager (Informant #11) observed:

"We watch subcontracted migrant workers pulling 18-hour shifts back-to-back during major exhibition build-ins without proper safety harnesses. ISO 20121:2024 forces us to audit this supply chain, but it's a structural blind spot we are afraid to look into."

4.3 The 5-Is Strategic Model

To address the aforementioned problems and obstacles, this research has synthesized the knowledge gained and developed the "5-Is Strategic Model" as a guideline framework for the integrated strategic management of MICE events for sustainability. This model is designed to align Thai operators with international standards and address the specific structural gaps identified.

Table 1: Details of the 5-Is Strategic Model Elements

Strategic Element	Description and Practice	Problem Addressed
1. Intention	Determined Intent Creating clear commitment from senior executives and building a Shared Vision within the organization to shift motivation from extrinsic (doing because forced to) to intrinsic (doing because wanting to). This involves integrating sustainability into the corporate mission and values, rather than treating it as a compliance checklist (Cheng & Xu, 2023).	Solves Policy Disconnect by building understanding and acceptance from employees at all levels. When staff understand the "why," they are more likely to execute the "how" effectively.
2. Integration	Resource Integration Building Partnership networks among organizers, venues, and suppliers to share resources, knowledge, and costs (Resource Pooling). This includes creating "Green Clusters" where SMEs can collectively negotiate for sustainable materials or waste management services at lower rates.	Solves the Cost Paradox by reducing unit costs and increasing SMEs' bargaining power. It leverages the Sharing Economy to make sustainability affordable.
3. Implementation	Operational Excellence Elevating work efficiency through personnel skill development (Reskilling/Upskilling) and applying technology to reduce errors and increase precision. Adopting tools like carbon footprint calculators and digital waste tracking dashboards.	Solves the Skills Gap and increases on-site resource management efficiency. Ensures that the workforce has the technical "Green Competencies" required by modern standards (Mair, 2021).
4. Inclusivity	Coverage and Care Expanding the scope of sustainability to cover social dimensions, human rights, and	Reduces Social Risks and builds community acceptance (Social License to Operate).

Strategic Element	Description and Practice	Problem Addressed
5. Impact	local community participation according to the principle of "Leaving No One Behind." Conducting due diligence on labor practices in the supply chain and engaging local communities in event planning (Mair & Duffy, 2015).	Addresses the human rights mandates of ISO 20121:2024 and upcoming legislation.
	Measurable Results Shifting from measuring activity-based results (Output) to measuring empirical results (Outcome/Impact) that are transparent, verifiable, and meet international standards. Using certified frameworks like T-VER or global reporting standards to quantify carbon reduction and social legacy (Andersson & Lundberg, 2013).	Builds credibility, prevents Greenwashing , and meets the needs of international clients who require rigorous ESG data for their own reporting.

To illustrate the dynamic interaction and operational flow of the synthesized model, the following framework visualizes how the five elements transform internal capability into external sustainable competitiveness:

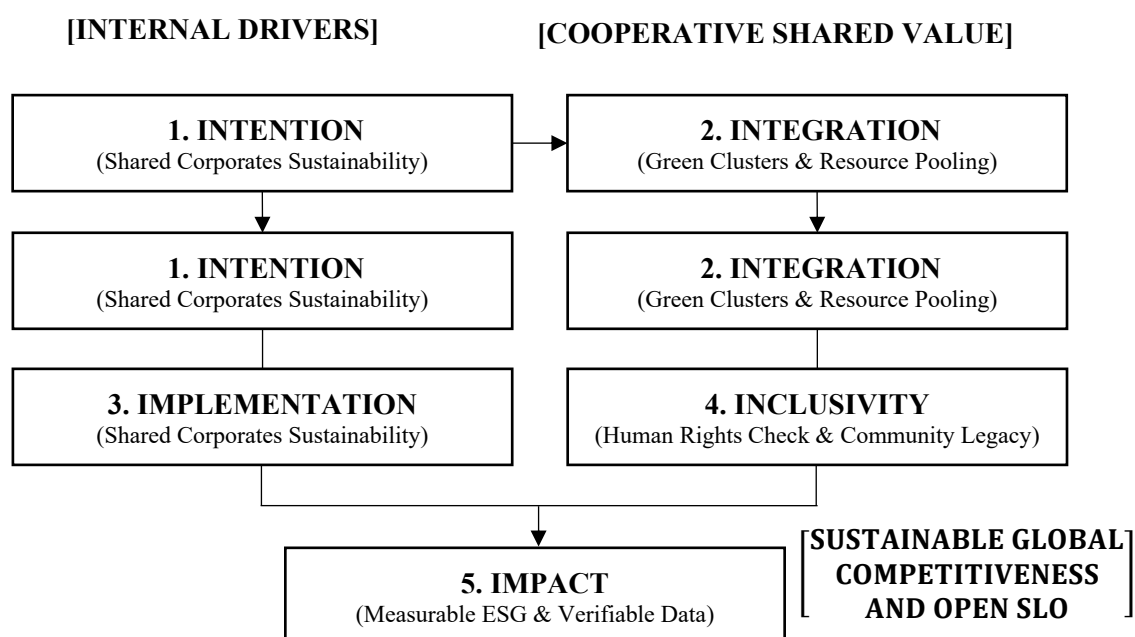


Figure 1: Details of the 5-Is Strategic Model Elements

5. Discussion

This study indicates that managing MICE events for sustainability is not about selective practices but about adjusting the "Paradigm" of doing business. The research results are consistent with the Resource-Based View (RBV) theory, which posits that organizations capable of turning sustainability into a "Core Competency" can create a competitive advantage over competitors (Dolasinski & Reynolds, 2025). By treating sustainability not as a cost center but as a strategic resource—one that is Valuable, Rare, Inimitable, and Non-substitutable (VRIN)—Thai operators can differentiate themselves in a crowded global market. For example, expertise in managing "carbon-neutral" events becomes a rare and valuable asset that attracts premium international clients.

However, the resource limitations of Thai SMEs remain a significant obstacle, consistent with the literature, which states that SMEs often face restrictions in accessing green innovation and technology (Buathong & Lai, 2017). The "Cost Paradox" issue discovered in this research reflects the failure of some market mechanisms to reward operators who perform well in the short term. Therefore, the Integration strategy in the 5-Is model is essential, as clustering operators will increase bargaining power and reduce shared infrastructure costs, aligning with the Sharing Economy concept. This approach allows SMEs to access resources (such as shared electric logistics fleets or bulk-purchased biodegradable materials) that they could not afford individually.

In the social dimension, identifying human rights risks in the supply chain is an urgent issue. Implementing the Inclusivity strategy is thus not an option but a necessity to prevent future reputational and legal risks, in line with increasingly strict international laws. The integration of human rights due diligence into the MICE supply chain is critical for maintaining the Social License to Operate (Stuart et al., 2023). As Stakeholder Theory suggests, the industry's legitimacy depends on its ability to meet the ethical expectations of all stakeholders, including the most vulnerable workers in the supply chain (Lacey & Lamont, 2014). The new ISO 20121:2024 standard exerts powerful normative pressure, pushing the industry to address these "invisible" risks before they become liabilities.

Furthermore, the alignment with Thailand's BCG Economy Model provides a unique opportunity. By positioning MICE as a platform to showcase Thailand's bio-circular-green innovations, the industry can tap into government support and align with the national development agenda. This strategic alignment reinforces the Intention element of the 5-Is model, creating a shared national vision for a sustainable MICE sector (Jung et al., 2024).

This study indicates that managing MICE events for sustainability is not about selective practices...

A crucial dimension for extending the utility of the 5-Is Strategic Model is its adaptability to other designated "MICE Cities" in Thailand, such as Chiang Mai, Phuket, and Khon Kaen. While the core pillars remain stable, the operationalization of the Integration and Inclusivity strategies must change according to regional variances:

Chiang Mai & Khon Kaen: Face severe logistical distances from sustainable material distribution hubs. Implementing the Integration strategy here requires building hyper-local supply chains leveraging indigenous bio-based handicrafts and local agricultural waste, transforming a logistical barrier into a cultural legacy differentiator.

Phuket: Operates heavily in the island tourism ecology. The Inclusivity strategy must prioritize coastal preservation and address high water-scarcity risks posed by large conventions, requiring different resource-pooling tactics than those used in the land-dense Bangkok Metropolitan Region.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

This research concludes that the Thai MICE industry has entered a new era in which sustainability is at the heart of survival and growth. Although Thai operators are alert and have potential, they remain constrained by structural problems in costs, skills, and policy linkages. The "License to Operate" is no longer a metaphor but a market reality, enforced by client contracts and emerging regulations such as the CSDDD and Thailand's own HREDD bill ([Santiago et al., 2021](#)). The 5-Is Strategic Model presented in this research (Intention, Integration, Implementation, Inclusivity, Impact) is considered a thought innovation that integrates various problem-solving approaches, enabling operators to apply it in planning and managing organizations to align with ISO 20121:2024 standards and global market demands truly. It offers a comprehensive roadmap for navigating the complexities of the modern sustainability landscape, moving beyond superficial compliance to genuine, value-creating transformation.

6.2 Recommendations

From the study, the researcher has policy and practical recommendations as follows:

Recommendations for Government and Promoting Agencies (e.g., TCEB):

Unlock the Cost Paradox: Accelerate financial and tax measures to help reduce cost burdens for SMEs wanting to improve processes towards sustainability. This could include "Green Innovation Vouchers" for SMEs to hire sustainability consultants, or low-interest loans to upgrade to energy-efficient technologies ([Mair & Laing, 2013](#)).

Central Resource Platform: Create a central platform for sharing knowledge and resources. This platform should provide simplified tools for carbon footprint calculation (tailored explicitly for Thai MICE events), templates for human rights due diligence, and a database of verified sustainable suppliers to facilitate the Integration strategy.

Regulatory Harmonization: Ensure that national standards, such as the Thailand MICE Venue Standard (TMVS), are fully aligned with the new ISO 20121:2024 requirements, particularly regarding human rights and legacy, to prepare Thai operators for global compliance ([Næss, 2021](#)).

Recommendations for Entrepreneurs:

Cultivate Intention: Prioritize creating a sustainable "Organizational Culture" (Intention). Senior management must lead by example, making sustainability a core KPI for all departments, not just a CSR function.

Leverage Integration: Seek supply chain partners to increase operational efficiency. Form alliances or "Green Clusters" to pool demand for sustainable products and services, thereby overcoming the cost disadvantages of being an SME (Draper et al., 2011).

Invest in Implementation: Start investing in personnel skill development (Implementation) to be ready for new standards. Focus on building "Green Competencies" such as data collection for carbon accounting and understanding legal requirements for labor rights.

Recommendations for the Education Sector:

Bridge the Skills Gap: Accelerate the development of short-term and long-term training curricula to produce personnel with specific sustainability skills in the MICE industry (Green MICE Professionals). Curricula should include practical modules on ISO 20121 implementation, carbon auditing, and sustainable supply chain management to help address the skills gap and support the labor market.

Action Research: Collaborate with industry players to conduct action research on "Legacy" creation, developing metrics and methodologies to measure the long-term social impact of events on Thai communities (Neal et al., 2015).

Driving the Thai MICE industry toward sustainability is not the mission of any single party; it requires cooperation from all sectors under a shared vision to turn crises and challenges into opportunities for balanced, sustainable growth. The 5-Is Strategic Model offers a unified framework to guide this collective journey, ensuring that Thailand remains a world-class, sustainable MICE destination that balances economic prosperity with social and environmental responsibility.

Limitations of the Study: While this research offers significant insights, several distinct limitations must be outlined to guide future scholarly work:

Geographic and Sample Limitation: This qualitative study relied on 20 purposively sampled informants, all from the Bangkok Metropolitan Region. Consequently, the findings cannot be broadly generalized to represent the entire landscape of Thailand. Future studies should employ quantitative methodologies (e.g., structural equation modeling) using cross-sectional sampling to test the generalizability of the 5-Is Model nationwide.

Regional Expansion: Future research must conduct comparative field studies across secondary MICE Cities (Chiang Mai, Phuket, Pattaya) to map out how localized infrastructural deficits alter the operational success of sustainable transitions.

Demand-Side Perspective Gap: This framework explores sustainability through the lens of supply-side industry players. To build a comprehensive market equilibrium model, future empirical studies should investigate the **Demand-Side (Event Attendees and International Delegates)** with respect to

their willingness to pay premiums for sustainable events and how green initiatives impact delegate satisfaction.

Ethical Declaration

To ensure the highest standards of academic excellence and protection of human subjects, this study was reviewed and formally approved by the Kasetsart University Institutional Review Board (Human Research Ethics Committee). (Approval Certificate No. KUREC-KPS069/16). Informed consent was obtained from all 20 key informants prior to conducting the interviews.

Declaration of Generative AI in Scientific Writing

The authors affirm that the preparation of this manuscript did not involve the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) or AI-assisted technologies for the generation of text or concepts. The content presented herein is the original work of the human authors.

Declaration of Competing Interests

The authors declare that there are no known financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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