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An Analysis of the Factors Influencing the Successful Implementation of MICE eRFP Platforms in the Hotel Business

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Abstract

Although the hotel business relies on MICE as a survival strategy amongst stiff competition, uncertainty about the returns on investment for MICE platforms remains a problem for hotels. This research study collected data from staff from 403 Thai hotels that use electronic Requests of Proposal (eRFP). The data were analyzed using a data science approach, which is an interdisciplinary method combining service design, digital technology and statistical data analysis. By employing linear regression to test for factors influencing successful eRFP implementation in the hotel business, the results showed that speed of business and hotel management leadership were statistically significant in influencing staff performance via eRFP in fulfilling customer expectations. In terms of organizational size, small and medium-sized hotels, managerial commitment and staff participation in driving the organization were found to be statistically significant in impacting successful eRFP implementation in the hotel business. A personal touch, including customer interaction/response, user interface design, and the accommodation of special customer requests were also found to be statistically significant in affecting successful eRFP implementation. The tested factors can be applied in a successful eRFP development or procurement approach for the hotel business.

Keywords

eRFP, MICE Platform, Hotel Business

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Background and Rationale

The Thai hotel business has integrated digital systems into its business strategy. 91% of hotels are confident in the security of their digital systems. However, Thai hotels are not yet able to verify returns on investment in digital systems (The Nation, 2016). The Thai hotel business is being confronted by disruptive technology, leading to new competition, such as individuals renting their private homes to holidaymakers via the Airbnb application.

The hotel business has viewed this phenomenon as an opportunity to drive service innovations to improve guest experience and ensure survival amid new competition (LaSalle, 2017). MICE is one such approach that Thai hotels have employed. Hotels offer facilities and/or services for meetings (M). incentive travel (I). national and international conferences (C). and exhibitions or events (E). Moreover, MICE plays a key role in a number of countries as it directly contributes to tourism, which includes hotels (Anas, Maddiah, Eizamly, Sulaiman, & Wee, 2019). MICE platforms, or electronic Requests of Proposal (eRFP) are used to provide hotel MICE services that are tailored to specific individual customer needs (Seaton, 2017). Customers requesting MICE services from hotels can use eRFP to request personalized details of services/facilities. This corresponds with the service user experience approach, a key to survival for Thai hotels. Despite this, investment in eRFP development in the hotel business is still beset by uncertainty in regard to returns.

Because hotel businesses do not fully understand the factors influencing successful eRFP development, this research aims to identify such factors to build an approach to support hotel business decision making for eRFP procurement and development. This should lead to higher investment returns and a greater chance of survival despite the constant rise of new competition.

Literature Review

To study the factors influencing the use of MICE platforms in the Thai hotel business, this research paper examines the ways in which Thai hotels can successfully procure or develop MICE platforms**.** The research questions were developed from a previous MICE study by Campiranon and Ramjan (2018), which examined the key success factors of MICE Electronic Request for Proposal (eRFP) by using a case study of Bangkok hotels. The results from the study revealed that the following factors influenced successful eRFP implementation in the hotel business: speed of business, business size, and the fulfillment of customer expectations (Campiranon & Ramjan, 2018).

1. Successful eRFP implementation

As one of the key stakeholders in the MICE sector (Campiranon & Arcodia, 2008), hotels commonly adopt electronic eRFP, for MICE reservations. eRFPs are online platforms which allow MICE customers to make requests through online channels. Unlike online hotel room bookings, however, MICE eRFP requires hotel staff to review and respond to each customer request (Global Business Travel Association & Council, 2015). By using eRFP, customers have higher bargaining power as they can compare prices and services from their suppliers at no cost (Almunawar, Anshari, & Susanto, 2013). Hotels use eRFP to fulfill individual and group customer requirements and specifications to provide flexible, timely service to accommodate diverse and rapidly changing needs. Successful eRFP implementation can be measured by the effectiveness of three factors: system performance, staff performance and expectation fulfillment.

1.1 System performance is the ability to prepare data on the ability to provide MICE services, with the options entered into an eRFP database by hotel staff. It also refers to the ability to determine customer requirements and specifications via eRFP and to convey them to hotel staff. The system must be able to do this quickly and in a user-friendly manner. The Global Business Travel Association and Council (2015) emphasized that eRFP system performance can be enhanced by utilizing emerging technologies which allow customers to view this information prior to making an eRFP. This can reduce the number of eRFPs sent to venues which are unavailable or out of the customer's price range. The system allows potential guests to access the hotel reservation system directly to see pricing and availability in real time.

1.2 Staff performance is the ability of staff to use eRFP. For staff, a good system should be easy to learn how to use in the shortest possible timeframe to minimize training costs and to enable staff to effectively fulfill customer requirements and specifications via eRFP. As suggested by the Global Business Travel Association and Council (2015), eRFP training for hotel staff is highly required to ensure staff retention. Campiranon and Ramjan (2018), agreed and added that technology is unavoidable, and the use of eRFP has increased significantly worldwide. Regardless of whether or not hotels use eRFP, staff training is important in order to maximize the use of technology whilst still providing personalized services to increase the conversion rate of MICE businesses.

1.3 Expectation fulfillment performance means that staff are able to fulfill customer service requests quickly via eRFP, such as answering customer enquiries via a chatbot. The system then sends reminders to customer bookings staff to enable them to accommodate the diverse and specific requirements of each customer group within 24 hours. The Global Business Travel Association and Council (2015), added that an understanding of the customer-demand patterns for MICE events is needed, as well as the

resources to help educate internal and external clients to refine their needs and expectations.

Based on the above literature review, this paper applies performances of system, staff and expectation fulfillment to represent successful eRFP implementation in the hotel business.

2. Speed of business

Using technology to accelerate the speed of service is crucial, as supported by a number of studies (Hertog, Wietze, & Jong, 2010; Hsieh, Chang, Ping, HsiuJu, & Yu-Chun, 2013). According to Campiranon and Ramjan (2018), speed of business is critical as hotels cannot sell yesterday's unsold rooms. Consequently, it is vital to provide speedy services to MICE customers in the hotel business. More importantly, hotels need to respond to eRFPs quickly. To achieve this, hotels need to focus on the following factors: service process, organizational culture and leadership.

2.1 Service process is the setup of the order of service delivery to users. Service must not only be delivered promptly, but also reflect the level of service that corresponds to the particular characteristics of each type of service and to the organizational image. Examples include the airline and banking businesses. As hotel services largely focus on personalized experiences (Tripathi, 2017), technology can be employed to enhance and customize services (Hsieh et al., 2013). Hotels can partner with international companies that specialize in customer relationship management (CRM). This partnership provides a CRM platform which enables a business to acquire insights into each individual and thus foster loyalty through service delivery, analytics, and timely communication (Karantzavelou, 2017).

2.2 Organizational culture is the concept and operational method rooted deeply in the practice of every staff member, reflecting organizational core values. In service businesses, organizational culture is applied as the main competency in customer service provision. Every staff member holds common values reflecting the ability to serve customers in line with consistent standards. For instance, IKEA is not only an innovative retail concept, but also revolutionary in how it is organized, how it empowers its employees, and how it has established a very clear organizational culture concerning how to provide service and how to approach clients appropriately (Hertog et al., 2010).

2. 3 Leadership is the ability to lead the organization to achieve its stated objectives with a reliance on management skills, with both vertical command and horizontal coordination, and supervision of staff to ensure work is done at the expected level of competency. In service businesses that rely on flexible operations, operational supervisors at every level must possess leadership skills. According to Zach (2013), leadership plays a critical role in the establishment of an organizational culture that enables knowledge

exchange and the development of new service offerings. Moreover, small organizations depend heavily on leadership, especially as most decision making at small organizations is left to the leaders, rather than with a complex organizational structure.

Research Question 1: How does the speed of business influence the successful implementation of MICE eRFP systems in the hotel business?

$H_{0.0}$: The hotel MICE service process influences MICE eRFP capability.

$H_{0.1}$: The hotel MICE service process influences the ability of hotel staff to use the MICE eRFP system.

$H_{0.2}$: The hotel MICE service process influences MICE eRFP performance expectations.

$H_{0.3}$: Hotel organizational culture influences MICE eRFP capability.

$H_{0.4}$: Hotel organizational culture influences the ability of hotel staff to use MICE eRFP.

$H_{0.5}$: Hotel organizational culture influences MICE eRFP performance expectations.

$H_{0.6}$: Leadership by hotel management influences MICE eRFP capability.

$H_{0.7}$: Leadership by hotel management influences the ability of hotel staff to use MICE eRFP.

$H_{0.8}$: Leadership by hotel management influences MICE eRFP performance expectations.

3. Organizational Size

Hotels need to consider the potential size of the MICE business before deciding to use eRFP. Whilst eRFP may work well for small and medium-sized MICE events, filling in requests for larger events such as conventions, which have complicated details, could pose a challenge for customers in completing an eRFP. In other words, eRFPs are important for a hotel's market presence; however, not all hotel sizes benefit from eRFP (Campiranon & Ramjan, 2018).

3.1 Small and medium tourism enterprises (SMTEs) are service providers with fewer than 250 staff. They are the majority of Thai tourism and service enterprises. The nature of business operations is not only structurally flexible, but can also accommodate fast connections with business partners. Tejada and Moreno (2012), emphasized that small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and innovation are important issues in the tourism business. Because innovation is among the key drivers of growth and development, innovation in tourism as well as the emergence of new opportunities of SME managers to increase organizational performance, have become significant topics for policy-makers.

3.2 Leadership commitment is the steering of an organization according to its stated vision, ensuring that all aspects of corporate operations abide by the organization's declared commitment to its people. Examples include provision of training opportunities to enable staff progression, or welfare provision as requested by trade unions. As Zach (2013) highlighted, leadership creates an organizational setting for innovation by providing necessary resources

and by becoming involved in a new service development process. In fact, leadership and employee commitments contribute to the development of successful tourism innovations and to a better fit with the market and organizational structure.

3.3 Stakeholder integration is when staff within an organization are aware of organizational strategy and understand their individual role in driving the organization forward according to that strategy in order to achieve the vision set by the leaders. According to Zafar, Butt, and Afzal (2014), employee involvement is an ongoing process to boost employee efforts in making decisions which increase organizational performance. Many organizations focus on employee participation and involvement to create a sense of ownership among employees, and to create an organizational environment in which they feel proud when contributing to planning and making decisions in order to achieve strategic goals.

Research Question 2: How does organizational size influence the successful implementation of MICE eRFP in the hotel business?

$H_{1.0}$: Hotels which fall into the SMTE category influence MICE eRFP capability.

$H_{1.1}$: Hotels which fall into the SMTE category influence the ability of hotel staff to use MICE eRFP.

$H_{1.2}$: Hotels which fall into the SMTE category influence MICE eRFP performance expectations.

$H_{1.3}$: Leadership commitment influences MICE eRFP capability.

$H_{1.4}$: Leadership commitment influences the ability of hotel staff to use MICE eRFP.

$H_{1.5}$: Leadership commitment influences MICE eRFP performance expectations.

$H_{1.6}$: Employee involvement in driving the organization influences MICE eRFP capability.

$H_{1.7}$: Employee involvement in driving the organization influences the ability of hotel staff to use MICE eRFP.

$H_{1.8}$: Employee involvement in driving the organization influences MICE eRFP performance expectations.

4. A Personal Touch

Technology and a personal touch should be utilized to enhance and customize service processes (Hsieh et al., 2013), as services largely focus on personalized experiences (Tripathi, 2017). As Campiranon and Ramjan (2018) pointed out, hotels need to integrate both technology and a personal touch. The use of technology is unavoidable, and the use of hospitality technology, such as eRFP, has grown rapidly worldwide. Regardless of whether or not hotels use eRFP, it is crucial for hotels to train their staff to balance the use of technology while still providing personalized services in order to increase the conversion rate of MICE revenue.

4.1 Customer interaction/response is the ability to interact with, and respond to, customers quickly with a personal touch while aiming to make the customer feel special. The interaction/response can take place either offline or online, especially with repeat and loyal service users, who add value to the organization. Yim, Tse, and Chan (2008), emphasized that favorable customer–staff interactions prompt positive customer–staff relationships, which may strengthen customer–organization linkages. Nonetheless, many organizations underestimate the contribution of customer–staff interactions to customer loyalty. Although they recognize the importance of customer–staff relationships for favorable service experiences, many discourage staff from developing strong relationships with customers for fear that such relationships might divert customer loyalty to the staff and away from the firm.

4.2 The user interface is the design of a user-friendly system both in the front office, which deals with customers, and in the back office, which is operated by staff. User interfaces are access points through which users can view services offered by hotels and interact with hotel staff. User interface design is a craft that requires building an essential part of the user experience. Users are very swift to judge designs on usability and likeability. Designers focus on building interfaces that users will find highly usable and efficient. Thus, it is important for designers to have a thorough understanding of the situations that users find themselves in when making those judgments (Interaction Design Foundation, 2019).

4.3 Customization happens when customers file a Request of Proposal (RFP) for MICE services and the hotel is able to accommodate the particular requirements of each customer. Examples include wedding planning or the catering details for conferences. As Campiranon and Ramjan (2018) suggested, hotels need to provide customized responses with a 'wow' factor for each MICE customer.

Research Question 3: How does personal touch influence the successful implementation of MICE eRFP in the hotel business?

$H_{2.0}$: Fast interaction with and response to customers / service users influences MICE eRFP capability.

$H_{2.1}$: Fast interaction with and response to customers / service users influences the ability of hotel staff to use MICE eRFP.

$H_{2.2}$: Fast interaction with and response to customers / service users influences MICE eRFP performance expectations.

$H_{2.3}$: A user-friendly interface influences MICE eRFP capability.

$H_{2.4}$: A user-friendly interface influences the ability of hotel staff to use MICE eRFP.

$H_{2.5}$: A user-friendly interface influences MICE eRFP performance expectations.

$H_{2.6}$: A digital platform which can accommodate special customer requirements influences MICE eRFP capability.

$H_{2.7}$: A digital platform which can accommodate special customer requirements influences the ability of hotel staff to use MICE eRFP.

$H_{2.8}$: A digital platform which can accommodate special customer requirements influences MICE eRFP performance expectations.

Based on the literature review, the following conceptual framework for testing research hypotheses was devised:

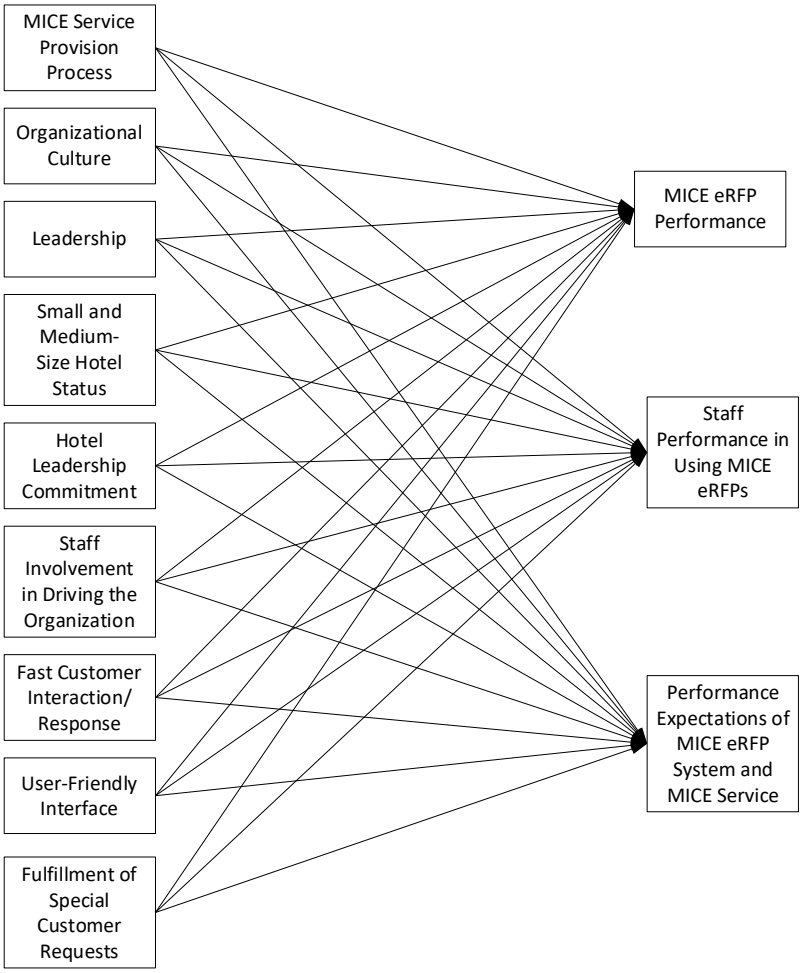

Figure 1 Research hypothesis framework

Methodology

To test the research hypotheses, data science processes were used to carry out what is an interdisciplinary study comprising the body of knowledge in service design, digital technology and statistical data analysis. This research adopted the following data science process:

Table 1 Data Science Process

Processes	Details
Data Exploration	Data scientists explore data from a data source such as social network comments or by asking target respondents directly. The data collection tool could be an online questionnaire or data extraction tool such as Twitter API (Aboukhalil, 2013). Feature selection is used to identify suitable factors for data analysis. If the data scientist is a domain expert, they can identify factors from their experience. Nonetheless, when lacking experience about the research question, they rely on a literature review or test a relationship between attribute in data set in order to explore a suitable factor to data mining model (Russo and Zou, 2020).
Data Pre-processing	After collecting a dataset, data scientists prepare a data set for data mining analysis such as missing value fulfillment or outlier detection. Moreover, attribute transformation modifies the semi-unstructured data to be structured data, which is ready for data mining and modeling (Guo et al., 2020)
Data Mining and Modeling	Data scientists rely on a number of data mining techniques to respond to research questions such as linear multiple regression or association rule mining, for example, to determine the factors that significantly affect a home-stay business which relies on a digital travel agent (Nguyen et al., 2017). Data scientists can use software such as RapidMiner to analyze a data set by modeling it without programming (Sudirman and Wanto, A, 2018).
Data Interpretation	After a dataset has been analyzed by the data mining model, the data scientist can then confirm its accuracy by comparing the data forecasting from the data mining model with the actual data set by employing root mean square error (RMSE). When RMSE is close to 100% , it means the forecasted result is accurate (Bianchi-Berthouze et al., 2002).

The target population comprised of domain experts in the use of MICE eRFP, which corresponds with the following conceptual framework for scientific data analysis (Yuri et al., 2019). Based on the research hypotheses and the data science process, this study sets out the research process in four stages as follows:

1. Data Exploration The target population for this study was MICE eRFP users in the hotel business. There are 24,391 hotels in Thailand (National Statistical Office, 2018). This study determined sampling in line with Yamane's (1973) principles, with tolerance set at 0.05 and a sample size of 400. Data were collected via Google Forms. After the survey, this research retrieved data from 403 staff at hotels in Bangkok.

2. Data Pre-Processing Although the questionnaire was meticulously designed in line with existing literature, errors can still occur in data collection due to respondents not completing forms correctly. This results in missing values. In order to improve the data mining efficiency, this study utilized machine learning to replace these missing values by forecasting possible values by employing a KNN algorithm and filling in the missing values based on the KNN result.

3. Data Mining and Modeling This research utilized a multiple linear regression model which is a data mining technique used in supervised learning. The feature selection process selected nine independent factors from the dataset to represent nine features which were used to forecast target factors as well as three dependent factors to be three target factor labels. In addition, this research employed the Split Test technique to categorize the dataset into two groups, which were the train set (70%) and the test set (30%). The train set was the actual dataset that the researchers used to train the model, which means the model from this data. On the other hand, the test set was the sample of data used to provide an unbiased evaluation of a final model fit of the training dataset.

Data analysis was undertaken in three rounds in order to answer three research questions. The first round was a comparison between a group of factors consisting of speed of business, organizational size, personal touch and MICE eRFP performance. The second round was a comparison between the group of factors consisting of speed of business, organizational size, personal touch and staff performance using eRFP. The third round was a comparison between the group of factors consisting of speed of business, organizational size, personal touch and the performance expectation of the MICE eRFP system and MICE service. The data were analyzed using multiple linear regression to determine how independent factors (Features) influenced the dependent factors (Labels) (see Figure 5 below).

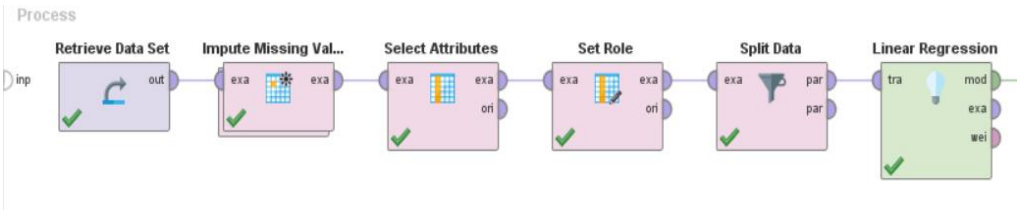

Figure 2 Data Analysis Process

4. Data interpretation For the validation of the research hypotheses concerning factors influencing MICE eRFP implementation in the hotel business, p-values of < 0.05 were counted as statistically significant. Validated hypotheses were used to advise hotels requiring MICE eRFP implementation. In order to confirm the efficiency of the multiple linear regression model that could be used to predict a result that is close to the actual figure, this research relied on the root mean square error: RMSE. The first round had a RMSE of 86%, which meant the that mean multiple linear regression model for the first research question could predict a result close to the actual data set. The second round had a RMSE of 78%, which meant that the mean multiple linear regression model for the second research question could predict a result close to the actual data set. The third round had a RMSE of 84%, which meant that the mean multiple linear regression model for the second research question could predict a result close to the actual data set.

Results

This study collected data through online questionnaires with 403 participants, all of whom were hotel staff in Thailand that use MICE eRFP in their work. The sample study revealed that the most common MICE service/facility provided by the Thai hotel business is meetings (67.2%), followed by conventions (51.2%), exhibitions (35.8%) and lastly, incentive tourism (25.9%). 97.8% of the sample group used an internally-developed MICE eRFP, while 47.9% used CVENT, a popular MICE platform worldwide. This means a large number of hotels employed both systems.

For data analysis purposes using the machine learning technique, data were split into two sets: the train set comprised 70%, or 281 participants, and the test set, comprised the remaining 30%, or 120 participants. Multiple regression analysis produced the following results:

Table 2 Results of Hypothesis Testing

Research Questions		**p-Value**	**Result**
		<0.05	
How does the speed of business influence the successful implementation of MICE eRFP systems in the hotel business?	$H_{0.0}$	0.076	Invalid
	$H_{0.1}$	0.397	Invalid
	$H_{0.2}$	0.692	Invalid
	$H_{0.3}$	0.227	Invalid
	$H_{0.4}$	0.604	Invalid
	$H_{0.5}$	0.228	Invalid
	$H_{0.6}$	0.087	Invalid
	$H_{0.7}$	0.027	Valid
	$H_{0.8}$	0.022	Valid
How does organizational size influence the successful implementation of MICE eRFP in the hotel business?	$H_{1.0}$	0.002	Valid
	$H_{1.1}$	0.034	Valid
	$H_{1.2}$	0.361	Invalid
	$H_{1.3}$	0.007	Valid
	$H_{1.4}$	0.034	Valid
	$H_{1.5}$	0.018	Valid
	$H_{1.6}$	0.001	Valid
	$H_{1.7}$	0.000	Valid
	$H_{1.8}$	0.009	Valid
How does personal touch influence the successful implementation of MICE eRFP in the hotel business?	$H_{2.0}$	0.001	Valid
	$H_{2.1}$	0.002	Valid
	$H_{2.2}$	0.356	Invalid
	$H_{2.3}$	0.004	Valid
	$H_{2.4}$	0.000	Valid
	$H_{2.5}$	0.000	Valid
	$H_{2.6}$	0.024	Valid
	$H_{2.7}$	0.136	Invalid
	$H_{2.8}$	0.004	Valid

Research question 1: How does the speed of business influence the successful implementation of MICE eRFP systems in the hotel business?

The results showed that MICE service processes designed by hotels did not influence MICE eRFP performance since the platform operational process is employed by hotels worldwide in providing MICE services/ facilities. Therefore, when developing or installing a new system, the MICE service process does not affect the design of the new system. This corresponds with the finding that the MICE service process does not influence staff performance in using the system internally. Staff already work in line with international standards when providing MICE services. It was also found that the MICE service process does not influence expectation fulfillment performance because hotels operate 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Consequently, staff are already able to fulfill customer MICE requests at any time.

Organizational culture also does not influence MICE eRFP capability as hotel MICE processes conform with universal industry standards. Corporate values or internal politics do not therefore impact system performance. This corroborates with the finding that organizational culture in hotels does not affect staff performance when using MICE eRFP as staff work according to standardized procedures.In addition, hotel organizational culture does not influence expectation fulfillment performance as staff can serve customers requesting MICE services in line with service standards. In addition, leadership by hotel management does not impact system performance. Although management may change, such changes do not affect the performance of systems that have been developed. Conversely, leadership by hotel management does influence staff performance in using MICE eRFP. This links with the finding that leadership by hotel management impacts MICE eRFP performance expectations. Despite MICE eRFP being able to use chatbots to deal quickly with customer requests for MICE services, the details of the request still need to be handled by hotel staff responsible for MICE services. As a result, leadership has an effect on staff morale and faith in the leaders, thereby impacting motivation at work.

Research question 2: How does organizational size influence the successful implementation of MICE eRFP in the hotel business?

Th operations of small and medium-sized hotels, which can be considered as part of the small and medium-sized tourism enterprises (SMTE) category, influence MICE eRFP performance. In other words, the hotel's smooth operational processes would influence the successful implementation of MICE eRFP. Small and medium-sized hotels also affected staff performance in using MICE eRFP, but did not influence expectation fulfillment performance. This is because customers requesting MICE services via MICE eRFP tend to expect good service which meets their specific requirements, regardless of hotel size.

Leadership commitment to customers and staff influences system performance in various ways due to the investment in MICE system development or installation as well as the preparation of hotel MICE service provision that facilitates good service standards. This corresponds with the finding that hotel leadership commitment impacts the performance of staff whose morale and motivation is boosted. Finally, hotel leadership commitment influences staff fulfillment of customer expectations. Staff with a sense of participation in driving the organization forward affects MICE eRFP system performance due to the staff's understanding of operations, to the point where the corporate vision can be achieved due to each staff member's contribution. This links with the finding that staff involvement in steering the organization influences the performance of the staff, who, as a result, feel part of a team. A sense of involvement also impacts customer expectation fulfillment by staff.

Research question 3: How does personal touch influence the successful implementation of MICE eRFP in the hotel business?

Customer interaction/ response influences system performance. Even if the system provides response tools for hotel customers requesting MICE services, fast responses to customer requests by each hotel staff member reflects the system performance as a whole. This corresponds with the finding that customer interaction/response impacts staff performance in using MICE eRFP. However, customer interaction/ response does not affect customer expectation fulfillment by hotel staff since customers only evaluate service effectiveness after having agreed service details with the hotel and having used the services. A user-friendly interface for both customers and staff influences system performance as both parties need to use MICE eRFP to make and respond to requests. This corroborates with the finding that a user-friendly interface for both customers and staff impacts staff performance.

An easy-to-use system allows staff to work quickly and effectively. A user-friendly interface for both customers and staff also affects expectation fulfillment performance as staff can use MICE eRFP to respond to customers promptly and are able to communicate with customers regarding any special requests stated in the MICE eRFP. Accommodation of special customer requests influences system performance. Therefore, in MICE eRFP development or installation, hotels need to design a system which accommodates the diverse special requests of each customer. However, accommodation of special customer requests does not influence the performance of staff whose job is to respond to customers via MICE eRFP. Finally, accommodation of special customer requests impacts expectation fulfillment performance since customers tend to expect their special requests to be met through the delivery of appropriate services.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This research study examined the factors influencing the use of MICE platforms in the hotel business. It was found that speed of business, including service process factors, organizational culture and leadership had no influence on the successful implementation of MICE eRFP in the hotel business. These findings are in line with Tucker and Aderiye (2016), who stated that organizational culture factors need to deeply integrate procedure and core values into service operation in external partnerships. Culture alone cannot drive service organizations towards success.

However, leadership by hotel management does impact staff morale and the motivation to fulfill customer expectations. This finding corresponds with findings by Salehzadeh, Khazaei Pool, Kia Lashaki, Dolati and Balouei Jamkhaneh (2015), who reported that leadership significantly influences hotel staff performance. Organizational size, including factors regarding SMTEs, leadership commitment, and staff involvement and participation in driving the organization impacts successful MICE eRFP implementation in the hotel business. This is in line with Rice's (2007) findings that commitment to stakeholders is part of the competency framework required in service businesses. On the other hand, hotel size does not affect the expectation fulfillment performance of hotel business MICE service provision.

A personal touch, customer interaction/ response, user interface and the accommodation of customer special service requests influence successful MICE eRFP implementation in the hotel business. This links with Baeshen, Al-Karaghouli and Ghoneim's (2017) findings that satisfaction with requesting and receiving services via digital systems influences customer decisions in purchasing services. The findings also correspond with Silamai, Khamchuen and Phithakkitnukoon (2017), who reported that the ability to respond to the different requests of each customer via a digital platform is an important component of hotel service provision support systems. However, customer interaction/response does not impact customer expectation fulfillment because customers evaluate the service at the end of the process. This ties in with Larsen, Tonge and Lewis (2007), who stated that after a sale has been made, hotels should prepare the best service tailored to customer requests and make it part of the service provision design.

To achieve the aim of this study, it is therefore vital for this study to provide the following recommendations to not only executives at hotels currently offering MICE services, but also hotels aiming to provide MICE eRFP platforms in the future through internal development (via commissioning a software vendor) or through the procurement of ready-made MICE software.

Firstly, hotel executives should redesign or enhance the service process in order to provide MICE services that are beyond the expectations of customers and to satisfy

customer MICE requests in order to successfully implement MICE eRFP. Secondly, large hotels should manage business continuity by learning from small and medium-sized hotels who offer MICE services. Thirdly, hotel executives cannot afford to ignore social factors that affect the morale of staff, who provide services to customers by responding to MICE eRFP requests, despite the fact that MICE eRFP systems rely on digital technology. Fourthly, various aspects regarding hotel executives' commitment are also significant factors that influence MICE operations.

To ensure the hotel's commitment, hotel executives should focus on the utilization of a participatory management system that communicates hotel strategy to front-line staff to ensure that they understand and are mindful of their role in driving the organization. Finally, real-time MICE service procedures carried out by staff are another important factor that allow staff to quickly respond to customers via MICE eRFP, either through chatbots or direct messaging, as well as to conduct follow-up processes that fulfill the special requests of each customer.

During MICE eRFP development or procurement, the design of a user-friendly interface for both customers and staff is something that hotel management must consider thoroughly. The system should be tested in order to identify problems, especially regarding the fulfillment of special customer requests. It is envisaged that this study can be applied as a management approach for successful MICE platform implementation in the hotel business as well as a springboard for further research of a similar nature.

Future studies should compare the success of eRFP implementation for different MICE activities, such as meetings vs. exhibitions. Furthermore, other factors influencing the eRFP should be studied, such as the cost of implementation. As emphasized by Alrawadieh, Alrawadieh, and Cetin (2020), the cost of implementation could be an influential factor in the digital transformation of hotels.

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