

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT OF COVID-19: INSIGHTS FOR THE EVENT TOURISM MANAGEMENT INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

This literature review looks at the macro environmental impacts of COVID-19 on the event tourism industry from three aspects, namely, environmental, economic, and technological factors. The literature is then looked at from a sustainability perspective which questions what has happened to the event tourism experience, whether the pandemic has permanently changed the event landscape, and if life would return to how it used to be before the outbreak of the virus. Paired with theoretical discussion, the findings include positive and negative environmental impacts, the acceptance of sustainable event organizing that prioritizes natural capital, economic drawbacks and solutions, and the technological adaptations to event tourism. The relevant theories such as the macro-environmental factors and Theory of Planned Behavior had been reflected in this review. The significance of this review will help develop further arguments on issues that are indirectly affected by the changes of today.

Keyword: COVID-19, Environment, Economy, Technology, Event Tourism, Hybrid Events

Introduction

What are events? As far as the textbook definition goes, events are a complex social endeavour involving multiple stakeholders, that are coupled with complex planning and a fixed cutoff date (Van der Wagen, 2006). Delving in deeper, events is a multidisciplinary field that can be broken down and has several disciplines overlapping one another (Bouchon, et al., 2015; Getz & Page, 2019). For this paper, the events that will be debated over are those that fit in the event tourism sector. Tourism destinations regularly offer an event portfolio that comprises of planned events, festivals and culture, business events including MICE, as well as sports and entertainment events (Van Niekerk, 2017; Swarbrooke & Horner, 2012).

In 2019, the emergence of Covid-19 in Wuhan China had taken place with a series of acute respiratory syndrome (Lu 2020). World Health Organisation had indicated as of 11th March 2020, that there were 114 countries involved and declaring as a pandemic (WHO 2020). Most countries had gone into a lockdown and implement the movement control to stop the spread of the deadly virus. The event management and tourism industry had been hit hard as all social events had to be cancelled.

This literature review will pose three research questions, which shall be discussed critically. First, what will happen to the event tourism experience? As the pandemic has thrown a spanner in the works for what is traditionally understood as an event, the only logical course of action for event organizers is to adapt and survive. Next, has COVID-19 reshaped the event landscape for good? In the last twenty months approximately, events have taken on a completely different outlook. The physical experience has been forcefully omitted due to circumstances and in its place, content creation is the key interest that makes or breaks an event. New technologies have been adopted hastily to ensure the

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survival of the event industry as a whole (Bustard, et al., 2019; Simons, 2019). Finally, will the new normal replace the old normal? Many new changes have taken place, yet this question can never be answered correctly until after the pandemic. COVID-19 has been a shock to the system that the planet has grown accustomed to, hence posing a very interesting question for all of humanity to decide; what will be normal henceforth? This review will look into some of the literature gaps surrounding these research questions.

The review is based on how the present day macroenvironment has affected the events sector. Environmental, economic, and technological approaches are the most common among sourced literature and bear significant influence towards event tourism in these trying times, apart from their general impact to life as we know it. The research methods and models put forth have been revised for further discussion with the research objectives set as the guidelines.

Environmental Factors: Drawbacks and Adaptations

Environment factors is very important macro-environmental factor that could greatly disrupt any kind of business. As for event and tourism industry, issues such as pollution, Co2 emission, climate change, air and noise pollution, has been a concern. Outdoor events will be particularly exposed to far greater environmental risk compared to indoor events. Businesses today are looking at sustainable strategies and to reduce environmental degradation.

Globally, the environment has been taken for spin before, and during this COVID-19 pandemic. The world economy prior to December 2019 was booming and requires no explanation of its effects on the environment. However, the pandemic had brought a halt to many of these activities. Rume and Didar-UI Islam (2020) have been able to summarize both positive and negative impacts of COVID-19 on the environment. Prominently, the falling rates of air, water, and noise pollution were the highlights. Nonetheless, much like a seesaw, when one end falls, another rises. The pandemic has caused a state of emergency worldwide resulting in negative environmental effects too such as the increase of biomedical waste generation, indiscriminate disposal of safety equipment, increased solid waste generation within communities, and a reduction in recycling (Rume & Didar-UI Islam, 2020; Zambrano- Monserrate, et al., 2020; Rahman, et al., 2020). As the world moved into a phase of fear and uncertainty, several measures were taken to protect human lives as well as the livelihoods of the people. Governments were forced to impose lockdowns and those that disregarded it, paid a hefty price (Nicola, et al., 2020). Decisions as such have caused other industries such as the aviation sector to almost completely shut down. Wallace (2020) reports that global flights, both domestic and international, have dropped by 96% within just six months of the outbreak. Contrastingly, this resulted in lower emissions of greenhouse gases (GHGs) as well as reduced burning of fossil fuels. The transport sector's contributions of emissions worldwide by vehicles and aviation stand at 72% and 11% respectively (Henriques, 2020).

The positive and negative implications of the pandemic on the environment is truly alarming as necessary measures need to be taken to tackle these problems. Mega-events such as the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and EURO 2020 have had to be postponed to the current year and organizing these events with added health safety measures is an even bigger logistical nightmare than what they already are. The concept of sustainability is a must to the lexicon of event tourism today (Hall, 2012). To be successful, the cost of sustainability comes into question. "Why should I practice sustainable organizing if it is more expensive to do so?" is often at the top of queries on the matter. Often, it is not sustainable to host a sustainable event simply because of the way it was conceptualized. Hall (2012) explains that mega-events built on economic or balanced sustainability are not sustainable at

all, instead it is the steady-state approach that maintains or enhances natural capital. Adopting such an approach can significantly help event organizers to present event that not only satisfy their stakeholder's needs, but also fulfilling those of the affected communities while recognizing the stock of natural capital as the indicator of development. In simple terms, does the infrastructure of these events cause the displacement of local communities? If no, there is no threat to natural capital. For context of the present day, hosting a mega-event such as the 2020 Tokyo Olympics should consider public health as an indicator of natural capital. The affected community in this case is the Japanese population, whom 80% of have opposed the organizing of the games (Eisenberg & Bushnell, 2021). The Behavioural Change Model is a theory that can be applied in this situation. Despite its simplistic linear structure, this model provides a platform for the consideration of any existing relationship between having knowledge of the environment, the awareness of and attitude towards the affected environment and its subdivisions, followed by the action or inaction regarding the matter at hand (Akintunde, 2017). Arguments on the locus of control and personal responsibility of those in power can be rationalized through a more complex model known as the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991; Akintunde, 2017). The theory helps understand how consequences and expectations of others can support or prevent behaviour. Pro-environmental behaviour in a time of COVID-19 is best reflected in the dilemma about the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, which will very soon be definitive. Optimistically, attitudes may change to maintain the natural capital and redirect the event tourism experience towards a more wholesome path.

Economic Factors: Drawbacks and Adaptations

Event management has significant economic contribution to local economies. On the other hand, global events such as Formula 1 Race, Olympic Games and FIFA World Cup will have a huge impact on a number of nations which creates global demand and involves greater number of stakeholders. Spending among local and international tourism will create a ripple effect in the economies of the host and participating countries.

The economic perspective is one that encompasses views from all angles. Connections between industries, either direct or indirect, have been gravely affected due to the pandemic. Due to modern day travel options, the spread of the virus has been effortless. Labelled as a black swan event, the COVID-19 outbreak has been detrimental on the global healthcare system, likening the economic scene to that of World War Two (Nicola, et al., 2020). Literature on economic drawbacks and adaptations have been clear and organized. This review will look at the impacts based on primary, secondary, and tertiary sectors (Barua, 2020; Nicola, et al., 2020). The primary sector is on that involves the extraction of raw materials, namely, agriculture as well as petroleum and oil. The struggle regarding agriculture is one that affects everyone until the smalltown farmers and fisherman. Measures taken by governments worldwide to curb the spread of the disease have shortened demand massively. For instance, the crash in demand from the hospitality industry has sent agricultural commodity prices plummeting (Nicola, et al., 2020). The situation seem like an economic disaster as the actions taken to prioritize public health have in fact resulted in unemployment, food shortages, and a pervasive exploitation of the poor. This is visible as 'panic buying' has contributed to further complicating shortages beyond store shelves (Nicola, et al., 2020). However, the demand response varies based on the type of goods, either essential or non-essential. Though essentials such as food, medicine, and shelter remain operational, non-essential goods and services such as event tourism are at a dead end (Barua, 2020).

The manufacturing industry, as a faction of the secondary sector, has undergone a mixed set of experiences. Once again, the debate on essential versus non-essential goods comes into play. With

rising cases all around the world, demand for medical resources such as surgical masks and personal protective equipment (PPE) have skyrocketed (Rowan & Laffey, 2021; Sangkham, 2020; Nicola, et al., 2020). Subsequently, causing increased amounts of infectious waste, other environmental problems, and health hazards (Sangkham, 2020; Rahman, et al., 2020; Somani, et al., 2020; Zambrano-Monserrate, et al., 2020; Rume & Didar-Ul Islam, 2020). Apart from travel, the aviation industry supports in the export and import of goods. The disruptions in transport and logistics has caused substantial shock to the global supply chain. Travel restrictions on international flights have governments being concerned about the goods that they import. Therefore, even logistics companies who are supposed to bridge the social distancing gap between the business and consumer are under the microscope. This has resulted in global airlines to stop cargo transport, retrenchment of workers, and a major slump in productions reliant on these cargo services (Barua, 2020).

Event tourism falls in the tertiary sector of economic impacts (Nicola, et al., 2020). It is a known fact that for the event tourism sector to flourish, all participating industry segments need to play their parts. The event tourism experience depends immensely on collective inputs. For example, Nicola, et al. (2020) raises concerns on the number of cancelled or postponed scientific conferences as of late. It may seem trivial to question the magnitude of these events in a time of crisis. Then again, the dissemination of research as well the potential for expanding boundaries in the form of networking and employment rely on these conferences taking place. When a conference or any MICE event is cancelled, the impact is felt across multiple other factions. In the hospitality industry, the expected influx of customers would not be met hence dwindling occupancy rates. Low occupancy rates mean the reduced need for daily wage earners. Yes, digitalizing MICE events may be a viable solution for event organizers (Vok Dams, 2020; H'Up , 2021; Bas & Sivaprasad, 2020), but the opportunity cost of that is the loss of cultural, geographical, and essentially the human experience of event tourism.

Technological Factors: Drawbacks and Adaptations

Technological factors have changes rapidly over the decades with newer technology platforms such as 5G. This type of enhancement had led to better creation of technology products and processes. In the event and tourism industry, technologies in the aspects of ticketing, safety, scheduling and safety procedures in common. However, now we have the emerging technologies being used such as virtual reality, real time analytics, gamification, innovative programming and consumer generated content had been incorporated to enhance the consumers' experience.

If there ever is a time for Albert Einstein's famous quote to be relevant, it would be today. In 2020 alone, the world has been forced to adapt a new normal. Technology has exceeded the very core of being human. Event tourism is a sector that conjoins two industry segments heavily reliant on the human condition. Is watching a live performance the same as absorbing the ambience at a Rock concert? Is watching the sunset on live television the same as being on the sandy beaches of Hawaii? Clearly, the answer to both questions is no. Today's event world has seen some groundbreaking improvements on a technological standpoint. Taking a step back, if there is a silver lining on this dark cloud, it would be technology. In fact, the very reason for worldwide rapid responses to the outbreak is due to the advancements made through tedious research. When the World Health Organization (WHO) raised COVID-19's status to a pandemic, thirty-five companies and academic institutions began their research on a vaccine (Nicola, et al., 2020).

The wider impacts COVID-19 has had on technologies crosses many fields. With social distancing in place, corporations have resorted to having their employees work remotely. in fact, even the education sector has moved to remote utility to ensure continuation (Nicola, et al., 2020; Bas &

Sivaprasad, 2020). The pandemic has highlighted the importance of technology to daily living and may even be adopted entirely (Queen, 2021). Location services for instance, have been used by governments worldwide to help in contact tracing COVID-19. This would not have been possible without the help of accessible technology. Speaking of, apart from the vaccine research and other medical achievements, a more distant interaction in the form of telehealth technologies is a certain result of the pandemic. As hospitals across the globe continue to be filled with COVID-19 cases, tele-response bots powered by fifth generation (5G) wireless networks are at their maximum output to aid the communication of healthcare staff with their patients, monitor their health, and even provide feasible treatment such as prescriptions or other medical supplies (Nicola, et al., 2020; Queen, 2021). Even in the food sector, technology is being used to supply the demands of customers within the comfort of their homes, all in the name of social distancing and prioritizing public health.

Technology may have saved the event tourism sector from collapsing. Due to the pandemic, any form of close human interaction is not advised, and alternative action is taken. The MICE sector for instance, has embraced the new digital culture and are conducting hybrid events for their clientele (Bas & Sivaprasad, 2020; Hoods & Pakarinen, 2018; Vok Dams, 2020). Questioning its relativity to event tourism, do hybrid events pass off as travelling to a destination to experience an event? Well, physically it goes against the event experience but given the current crisis, hybrid events are the pathway to the new event tourism experience. Immersive technologies such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) enhance interactions event-goers experience. Hybrid events that inculcate live marketing with that of mobile applications, social media, and location-based services (MoSoLo) can help transform the event tourism industry to a more agile business that is able to cope with any uncertainties of the future (Bas & Sivaprasad, 2020; Vok Dams, 2020; Hoods & Pakarinen, 2018).

Though technology has come leaps and bounds, the question of whether things will go back to normal persists. The use of artificial intelligence to mimic human intellect can be taken offence upon as more and more jobs have been replaced with new technology. A generation that experienced having waiters at their table is now faced with a digital screen that collects orders. Conceivably, this would not affect the current generation of millennials, but those of generation X. Subsequently, the amount of unemployment which would result from such changes too would expand the gap between middle-income earners and low-income earners even further. According to the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991), ethical issues regarding an unfair change in the cost of living would be induced as the rich would enjoy the convenience technology has to offer, but the poor may not even be able to put food on the table. This cost-of-living influences education which incidentally affects employment. Highly skilled jobs demand for highly trained workers with multiple qualifications. Although a very rash simplification of the situation, the TPB forces the human mind to ponder on the ethical use of technology, which should ease human life rather than displacing it entirely.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, the event tourism sector has significantly undergone a massive makeover in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. The literature reviewed has provided an in depth understanding of the general macroenvironmental impacts COVID-19 has induced from an environmental, economic, and technological standpoint. Then, followed by views from a sustainable event management perspective towards the event tourism industry. The environment has been positively and negatively impacted during this pandemic, questioning event practices and whether they should be revisited to maintain and enhance the natural capital that is planet Earth along with all its inhabitants. The economic argument centers the impact that has befallen the world economy and the measures taken to salvage

what is left to make ends meet. The literature has underlined the complexity of event tourism and the importance of having all key players at their best to continue running. Technological factors on the other hand are vital now more than ever as it has been the link to daily life. Without it, the rapid response towards this pandemic outbreak may not have been possible and so would the survival of the event tourism sector. Lastly, future event management research may include a more in- depth analysis on the thoughts of event experience. The use of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) may assure a detailed examination of the digital event experience, making event research more accessible and relatable to other fields of study (Bustard, et al., 2019). Sustainability in event tourism industry is not undergoing a ‘pandemic pause’ but it’s very much alive and therefore it can’t be ignored.

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