Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Communication Element of MICE Industry in Thailand

องค์ประกอบการสื่อสารความรับผิดชอบต่อสังคมของอุตสาหกรรมไมซ์ประเทศไทย

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Abstract

CSR communication of Thailand's MICE businesses can be sustainably and successfully marketed when certain information related to CSR is provided to their target clients. This research aims to determine the CSR communication components of Thailand's MICE industry. The study employed a qualitative research discipline using a purposive sampling method to include a target group of 11 scholars in marketing and marketing communications, executives of organizations related to MICE, and operators involved in the MICE industry. An in–person, in–depth interview was used in data collection. Three major CSR communication components and nine sub–elements emerged from the analysis of qualitative data. The first major element is environmental impacts, which includes the three sub–elements of 1) impacts from the use of resources 2) food & beverage and 3) waste management. The second key component is society and economy, which includes: 1) compliance to the law, 2) retention of ways of life and cultures, and 3) enhancement of social and economic growth. And the third key component includes the people related to the MICE industry, which are 1) the local community, 2) the staff, and 3) the manufacturers. To uphold the sustainability of MICE industry in Thailand all the stakeholders including Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau, exhibition centers, hotels, tour companies and meeting and conference organizers should put forward these CSR communication components and nine sub–elements components to attract their target customers.

Keywords : corporate social responsibility, communication, MICE industry

บทคัดย่อ

การสื่อสารความรับผิดชอบต่อสังคมของอุตสาหกรรมไมซ์ประเทศไทย เป็นการทำการตลาด อย่างยั่งยืน ธุรกิจจึงจำเป็นต้องทราบองค์ประกอบสำคัญในการให้ข้อมูลแก่กลุ่มเป้าหมาย การวิจัยนี้ มีวัตถุประสงค์ เพื่อศึกษาและวิเคราะห์องค์ประกอบของการสื่อสารความรับผิดชอบต่อสังคมของ อุตสาหกรรมไมซ์ประเทศไทย ซึ่งเป็นการดำเนินการวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพโดยทำการเลือกกลุ่มเป้าหมายแบบ เจาะจง ดังนี้ นักวิชาการด้านการตลาดและสื่อสารการตลาด ผู้บริหารระดับสูงขององค์กรที่เกี่ยวข้องกับ อุตสาหกรรมไมซ์ ผู้ประกอบการที่เกี่ยวข้องกับอุตสาหกรรมไมซ์รวม 11 ราย และทำการสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึก แบบตัวต่อตัว ผลการวิจัยพบว่า องค์ประกอบของการสื่อสารความรับผิดชอบต่อสังคม มี 3 องค์ประกอบ หลัก และ 9 องค์ประกอบย่อย ซึ่งแบ่งเป็นองค์ประกอบหลักที่ 1 ด้านสิ่งแวดล้อม ได้แก่ 1) ผลกระทบต่อ การใช้ทรัพยากร 2) อาหารและเครื่องดื่ม 3) การจัดการขยะ องค์ประกอบหลักที่ 2 ด้านสังคมและเศรษฐกิจ ได้แก่ 1) การปฏิบัติและเคารพกฎหมาย 2) การรักษาวิถีชีวิตและวัฒนธรรม 3) การเติบโตทางสังคม และเศรษฐกิจ และองค์ประกอบหลักที่ 3 ด้านผู้มีส่วนเกี่ยวข้อง ได้แก่ 1) ท้องถิ่นและชุมชน 2) พนักงาน 3) ผู้ผลิตสินค้า ในการสื่อสารทางการตลาดเพื่อให้เกิดความยั่งยืนนั้น ผู้มีส่วนเกี่ยวข้อง ได้แก่ สำนักงาน ส่งเสริมการจัดประชุมและนิทรรศการ ศูนย์ประชุม โรงแรม บริษัทนำเที่ยว รวมถึงบริษัทผู้รับจัดงาน ควรสื่อสารโดยนำเอาองค์ประกอบและรายละเอียดดังกล่าวมานำเสนอเป็นประเด็นสำคัญ

คำสำคัญ : ความรับผิดชอบต่อสังคม การสื่อสารความรับผิดชอบต่อสังคม อุตสาหกรรมไมซ์

Introduction

In the past, organizations focused on maximizing profits in the form of cash. Since the year 1950; however, businesses have moved about towards a more concern on responsibility of the organization to the society, known as corporate social responsibility (CSR). The CSR concept asserts that businesses cannot be run for the monetary profit alone; concerns for the benefits to the society should be of greater consideration. It also proposes monitoring of the corporate activities catering social responsibility of the businesses and communicating the CSR activities to all the stakeholders of the business (Frederick, 1960; Walton, 1967). In addition to corporate activities based on the concept of social responsibility business corporate needs to publicize their CSR activities to make sure that all stakeholders can monitor these CSR activities (GRI, 2002; GRI, 2006; GRI, 2008; GRI, 2009). In Thailand situation the concept of corporate social responsibility is in line with the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy in the National Economic and Social Development Plan No.11 (2012–2016), which gives priority to accommodate the changes in the economic, social and environmental resources, emphasizing the strategy of sustainable management of natural resources. In the same way, CSR concept of the business corporate shares this same goal: that is to create a sustainable organization. The CSR concept has evolved

and widely accepted among both the public and private sectors, especially those involved in the tourism industry which has been generating excellent income for many countries, including Thailand (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, 2012). An enormous amount of revenue from the tourism industry can be used to build up infrastructure in the tourist destination cities and spread out into local resident areas. This way, the tourism revenue can bring about wealth to the country in both the social and economic growth. However, activities in the tourism industry rely mostly on natural resources; therefore, all stakeholders must cooperate in maintaining the sustainability of natural resources along with growth in the tourism industry.

The MICE industry, as a part of tourism industry, is one business sector that can attract quality tourists to travel to and join activities in the MICE events, such as meetings, touring incentives and exhibitions. At present, Thailand has been focusing on the effective management of this group of MICE tourists. Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau was established in the year 2004 to be responsible for the MICE industry (Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau: TCEP). TCEP is continuously responsible for planning and monitoring MICE activities and the business CSR activities. The most recent promotion of Thailand MICE events has been done through the campaign called "Thailand; the CSR Destination: Sustainability & Soulful" in AIME 2016 Trade Show in Melbourne, Australia. This event was an important driving force behind the success and acceptance of the MICE industry. It also helped encourage more visitors of the MICE industry to choose Thailand as their destination (Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEP), 2016).

However, to establish the concept of and trust on social responsibility of their business, CSR activities the businesses have conducted need to be well publicized to all stakeholders of the business and their prospect customers. Communication can be done via various forms of high technology communication channels by which the message is transmitted to the audience, ideas can be exchanged and questions can be asked and answered easily through modern media. The contents of CSR activities, so far, have not been evidently publicized. It is therefore important that the message on CSR activities must be clearly and effectively communicated to the public so as to reduce doubts and build credibility for the organization. The researchers therefore wish to search for the precise components of corporate social responsibility, so as to apply them for the more reasonable CSR elements to achieve sustainability of the MICE industry.

Literature Review

　　　　The critical concepts and theories related to corporate social responsibility and communications of corporate social responsibility are reviewed and discussed in this section.

　　　　The concept of corporate social responsibility

　　　　The concept of corporate social responsibility can be divided into three main theories: corporate social responsibility (CSR), the triple bottom line and stakeholder theory, each of which is a different theory and yet interrelated. Corporate social responsibility focuses on the activities of organizations that have an impact on economy, law and contribution to the community. CSR in economy emphasizes the economic growth of the business that goes together with that of the community. Legal and ethical responsibility is to operate business in compliance with the law within its administration, based on fairness, transparency, and accountability. And the business organization has a responsibility to the society in the form of charity or donations (Baumgarthe & Ebner, 2010; Bowd, 2006; Carrol, 1979; 1991; Schwartz & Carroll, 2003; Shrivastava, 1995; Van Marrewijk, 2003). The Triple Bottom Line prioritizes the organization's gains, coupled with economic, social and environmental sustainability to grow together without destroying whichever (Elkington, 1997). Finally, the Stakeholder Theory of management takes into account all stakeholders, including employees, customers and the community. Employee is a resource vital to the organization because the corporate policies can only be put into practice if the employee has positive attitude and willingness to comply with the established policies (Mishra & Suar, 2010). Customers will accept the goods and services that are environmental friendly (Ghosh & Gurunathan, 2013; Miishra & Suar, 2010). To the community, business must take into account the surrounding communities as stakeholders, such as schools, temples and hospitals (Skudiene & Aurskeviciene, 2012; Arevalo & Aravind, 2011).

　　　　The concept of corporate social responsibility communications

　　　　David K. Berlo has developed a theory explaining how the senders send the message successfully and how the recipients will receive, translate and interact with the message. In the S M C R theory, **S** – source of message senders need several capabilities including skills to communicate with the ability to "encode" contents, a positive attitude towards the recipients for a successful communication, good knowledge about the message to be transmitted, the ability to adjust the level of information that is easy or fit the level of knowledge of the recipients, and understanding of the social and cultural basis that corresponds to the recipients. **M** – message is related to the content, symbols and

the methods of sending messages. C – Channels of delivery should be able to send messages to the recipients with the full or a part of the five senses: sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell. R – receivers must have the skills to communicate with the ability to "decode" the content. The receiver must have approximately the same or similar attitude, knowledge and understanding of the social and cultural basis about the message transmitted as those of the source/sender for a successful communication.

Theories of functional communication can be divided into four theories: Libertarianism, Authoritarianism, Totalitarianism, and Social Responsibility. Concepts of social responsibility in each of these theories geared towards sustainability for the organization. It is important that the organization communicate the implementation of its corporate social responsibility; and this can create credibility for the business and positive attitude towards stakeholders that, in turn, bring about reputation and good image of the corporate (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2007, 2009, 2010). Further, communication of CSR can be used as a tool to demonstrate the corporate transparency (Podnar, 2008). The theories of communication, basically, aim to transmit information through the media to raise awareness and understanding to the audience. At present, however, there are a variety of communication media with much greater choices to be chosen for appropriate and easy to understand ways to communicate the corporate social responsibility concept and activities of the business (Christensen & Cheney, 2011; Schultz & Wehmeier, 2010).

Methodology

The researchers employed a qualitative research method and inductive inference of results in this study. Interpretation of Phenomena was used as a guide to understand the meaning elicited from those who have experience in the primary common meaning of the subject of the study. The concept of Interpretation of Phenomena or Hermeneutic person is a reasonable method of data collection to interpret this type of information. This concept believes that people are very important sources to the study since the ideas or information were gained from each of their own unique experience. However, the source persons need to have important traits, such as they have been living in the target area of study environment; they are valued in terms of experience and knowledge in the target area of study who can give valuable meaning and interpretation of the subject of the study (Brentano, 2014; Husserl, 2012). Although Interpretation of Phenomena in each theory have slightly different focuses, all in all, the common concept of phenomenology is based on the concept of "What is true is not necessarily something that can always be perceived

by the senses". However, many can be accessible only by understanding gained from the same experience of creating the conformity of essence. The ideas of same understanding and same experience from several individuals is consistent with the concept of Heidegger's phenomenology "constructivism" which is a theory that represents a foundation stone in building the knowledge of the study. The etymology of "construct" means "build" and in this case it refers to the creation of knowledge, mostly from the findings of the study (Creswell & Plano, 2007; Bhodhisita, 2007; Duffy & Cunningham, 1996).

Research Population and Sample

The researchers targeted a specific group representing the key informants in the MICE industry area to achieve a true reflection of the experience for the synthesis of communicating CSR issues to the public. This group of informants comprised a specific group of 11 scholars in marketing and marketing communications, executives of organizations related to MICE, and operators involved in the MICE industry. The number of informants depended on the adequacy of the gained information. When the information was available and sufficient to answer the research questions and complete all dimensions of the study that was the end of an interview. This data collecting method is in line with the method of qualitative research stating that phenomenological data is adequate when interviews with 5–10 informants (Houser, 2008). In this study data was gained adequately with the unstructured in–depth interviews with the suitable target group of 11 informants (Van Manen, 1978; Creswell & Plano, 2007).

Data Collecting Method

The researchers collected the data by employing the unstructured in–depth interviews with individual informants. The unstructured interview was used so that it can provide profound depth of information. Interview questions, however, were well drafted for the factual information, opinions and attitudes on the issues, while researchers made the interview more like a daily talk. For this type of data collection, the researchers must be experienced and well prepared before the interview so as to elicit factual information, opinions and attitudes on the issues of the study. In other words, obtaining this type of data depends mostly on the ability of researchers in asking questions to elicit more in–depth information on issues of the research (Creswell & Plano, 2007; Holsti, 1969; Chantawanichom, S., 2011).

Data Analysis

The results of analysis of data were derived from Interpretation of Phenomena based on Colaizzi's method as a way of understanding the human experience. It requires a process of learning from a dialog with the experienced person who can transmit data to a deep and synchronized reality. This qualitative phenomenological data analysis can be divided into three stages: 1) a variety of methods were employed to make sure that data were well–organized, while those not involved in the study were truncated. 2) The gained data were then displayed by means of a descriptive report, and 3) the findings, conclusions and inferences of the results were finally drafted and examined to answer the questions of the research (Plodpleung, A., 2014; Benner, 1994; Houser, 2008; Leonard, 1989). In this study data collection follows the stages as: first, the data recorded during the interview were transcribed for several times to obtain the necessary and adequate information for understanding the correct meaning of the information. Next, the results of each interview will then be reviewed in detail. This is a vital stage to get the noteworthy essence of the interviews. The main issues were finally categorized by keywords or phrases and explained in detail in a descriptive report, while some ambiguous issues were clarified so that they can be easily understood.

Research Context and Discussion

Communication of CSR of the MICE industry in Thailand, form the interview results, can be categorized into three main components.

The first major component is Environmental Impact : The environmental issues are the topics of concerns of people in the society. MICE operational activities, as a part of the tourism business, can unavoidable cause negative impacts on the environment. The tourists will have to use the limited resources available to their infinite needs. So it is essential that all stakeholders in MICE business recognize and cooperate in preservation of the environment (Archer, 1996; Thomas, 1992; Laarman & Gregersen, 1996). For the MICE industry, the consumption of resources related to foods and drinks is an important part of its events. With a large number of tourists, there will be an increasing amount of trash and wastes and this affects the community and environment, both in short and long terms. The waste management, therefore, must be well planned and implemented in due time and not being ignored for it may cause problems in a later time. This issue of environmental impact is of concern of one of the interviewees saying, "In MICE Industry which is one type of tourism models, food and beverage services are essential in their business

activities; and this causes an enormous amount of trash and waste. However, if the waste is managed well, it will not harm the environment. Therefore, good cares must be taken in the use of resources and waste management to care for the environment." The findings of this research showed that the first main CSR communication component of environmental impact can be further divided into three sub–elements. The first sub–element was impacts on the limited resources. It is therefore crucial that all involved sectors focus on the common care for the environment and communication of this issue should be done, so as to create awareness and understanding on the impact on the resources through the clear and modern communication media. The second sub–element, food and beverage were directly related to the activities and services of MICE industry. The services on food and beverage have to be well planned for the sake of environmental concerns. In the meantime, communications on quality of food and beverage such as ingredients, manufacturing and expiring dates must be clearly shown to ensure quality and safety for the tourist consumers. The third sub–element, waste management must be well planned and done. Communication must be done with all types of media to create cooperation and awareness in reducing waste caused by consumption of food and beverage. Promotion on the use of biodegradable packaging and practices in reduce, reuse and recycle of packaging should be done through communications that provide actual and easy to understand information.

The second major component is society and economy: the organization with a focus on social responsibility holds the conception of growing together with the society and economy, not only on the monetary gains. Business should be headed by a constructive impact on society: contributing to society, involving the society and the society will, in turn, attend to the sustainable competitiveness of businesses and its economic growth. As the MICE industry is currently aiming to cater their business to destinations in the regions (Archer, 1996; Laarman & Gregersen, 1996). This concept of mutual support is in accordance with the information gained from the interviews "At present, it is impossible for the enterprise to grow alone; it should grow along socially and economically with the community and in compliance to laws and ways of local living," The second main CSR component concerning society and economy can be further divided into three sub–elements. The first sub–element is compliance and respect to the laws. At present, communication in the issues concerning employee's right should be accurate, clear and up–to–date. The straightforward information should be given, such as the employee's benefits and their rights, compensation in regular time and overtime,

information on safety policy or even the right to take leaves. The second sub–element is to maintain the way of life and culture. The sustainable economic growth must go along with that of the local lifestyle and culture. This can happen through the creation of activities to enable participation and exchanges of knowledge and ideas. Culture and local life is valuable and must remain forever in tandem with the growth of the economy and society. Communication component in this area must be done fully for better understanding to achieve awareness and a willingness to share and learn. The third sub–element is the social and economic growth. MICE industry is an opportunity to create incomes and jobs for the workers in the touring destinations. At the same time, the organizations or enterprises have to develop their own capacity to meet their customers' demand and their own business goal. It is essential that organizations select the effective ways to communicate to the public on the economic and social growth along with their business growth.

The third major component concerns stakeholders. In MICE business, there are several parties consisting of shareholders, customers, employees and vendors, who have been affected, both directly and indirectly. How the organizations are managed will inevitably be expected by all stakeholders. The activities/events they organize will have both positive and negative impacts on all stakeholders, including local communities, employees and even suppliers of goods and services. Therefore, organizations must be able to carry out activities that can meet the needs of all stakeholders as much as possible (Freedman, 1984; Foster & Jonker, 2005). This idea is consistent with the data gained from the interviewees that "Stakeholders are those that organizations need to care for. For their successful events planning and scheduling of MICE activities should be organized in order to meet the demands and needs of all parties in the business, including customers, employees or local communities and manufacturers". The third main CSR communication component of stakeholders can be further divided into three sub–elements. The first sub–element s local areas and community. The stakeholders should be able to straightforwardly share and learn about the benefits and impacts the local community will have. All stakeholders should learn and exchange ideas and information openly and sincerely for mutual understanding and benefits. The second sub–element is employees. At present, human rights law and international agreements prioritize the workers/employees as an important mechanism to drive the successful activities of the organization. For organizational growth and sustainability of a business it is necessary that the business give priority to the care and attention to employees with fairness.

Employees should be able to develop continuously in knowledge and skills to grow professionally in their job with the full support by the organizations. The third sub–element is the entrepreneurs. The manufacturer of the products is an important part of the stakeholders in driving business plans of action to achieve the goal. Sharing and learning from accurate and complete information helps create conformity between entrepreneurs and the corporate, resulting in efficient decision making in MICE business.

Findings

The three main components and nine sub–elements of corporate social responsibility communication for Thailand's MICE industry are drafted in the following chart.
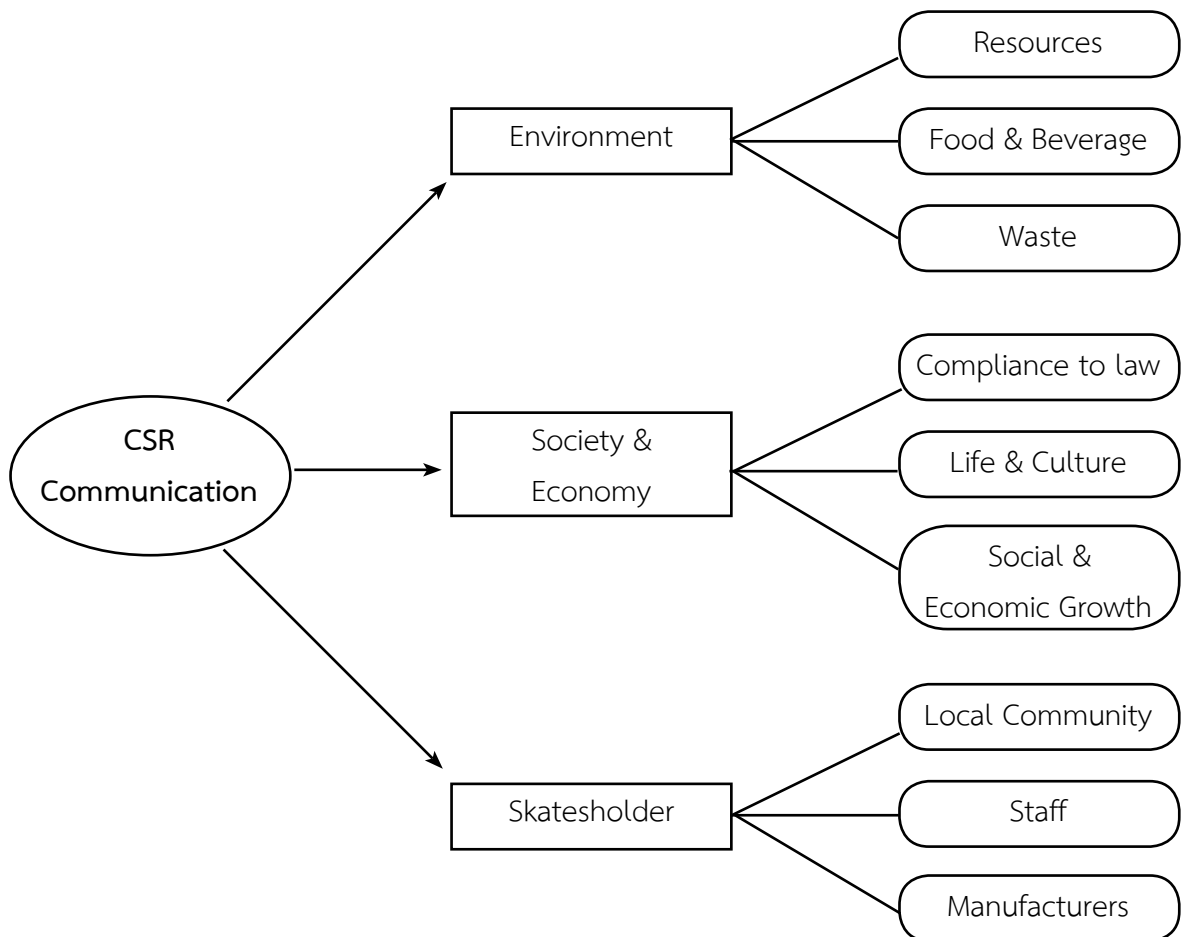
Conclusion

Findings of the study on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Communication Elements of the MICE Industry in Thailand were in accordance with the communication theories in terms of the three main components for communication, consisting of sender, message and receiver. The findings of the current research were explained in terms of messages to be communicated. The messages concerning CSR of MICE industry in

Thailand should comprise the three main components of impacts to the environment, society and economy, and living and culture of the country. The message concerning impacts to the environment covered detailed impacts of the business to natural resources both renewable and nonrenewable. Services of food and beverage could also cause environmental problems, without a good management of waste. The impacts of MICE industry on the society and economy of the country concern the issues of compliance to the laws, how to retain the ways of living and cultures, and how to enhance the social and economic growth of the local community. The final impacts of MICE industry are those to all the stakeholders of the business, including the local community, the staff/employee and the manufacturers/entrepreneurs, all of which should equally benefit from the industry.

Three main components and nine sub–elements of MICE CSR communication were emerging from the synthesis of qualitative data of the current study. These findings should be communicated to the customers and the public. The first key component is environmental concern with the sub–elements of compounded impact on resources. This should be of social responsibility in the issues on resource use, cooperation in conserving resources and statistics on availability and run–out of resources. Messages concerning food and drink must be communicated in CSR–related content including manufacturing and expiry dates, ingredients, and nutrition elements and other food safety information must be clearly shown. Another sub–element of this key CSR component concerns waste management. Contents to be communicated should include control of waste, recycling and impacts of the increasing volume of waste. The second main component is society and economy concern with three sub–elements of respect and compliance to the law. Messages should provide information on the protection of workers' rights and benefits, such as child labor, regular and overtime compensation and safety policy for employees. Another sub–element concerns conservation of lifestyle and culture of the local community. Information such as local uniqueness and beliefs should be shared and learned so as to convey the value of life and local culture. The last sub–element in this category is opportunities to earn money and services to be provided in response to customer demand, and innovations to be used, all of which can bring about sustainable development to individuals and the local community as a whole. The third main component is the stakeholders. The first sub–element of this category is of local areas and community. The sent message should provide information on the benefits and adverse effects and participation in social development of the local community. The second sub–element concerns the stakeholders in workforce. The employee must be

provided with opportunities for professional development, the guidelines for the development of knowledge and skills. The third sub–component concerns manufacturers /entrepreneurs. Important message to communicate in this area comprises product standards, quality improvement schemes for the products/services to meet the demand. Provision of information on all of these aspects will enhance the customer's decision to use the products/services.

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