



STRATEGI MEMPERTAHANKAN MATA PENCAHARIAN SELAMA PANDEMI: PELAJARAN DARI PENGUSAHA KULINER DI SALATIGA

The Strategy to Sustain Livelihood During Pandemic: Lesson From Culinary Entrepreneurs in Salatiga

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ABSTRACT

During the COVID-19 pandemic, sustainability of tourism-related livelihood is significantly deterred. Tourism-related SMEs, including culinary businesses, struggle to find ways to survive the pandemic. Coping strategy is expected to assist entrepreneurs to maintain livelihood during crisis. Thus, strategies to cope with the crisis becomes an important issue to elaborate. This study provides an empirical case of coping strategy implementation by presenting a case of culinary business in Salatiga, Central Jawa, Indonesia. Based on qualitative methods, this research investigates strategies of the culinary entrepreneurs to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic. Data are collected through interviews, observations and document studies. Findings show that although culinary entrepreneurs currently manage to survive, they have to struggle to maintain their livelihood. As the end of the pandemic is still unpredictable, the sustainability of their livelihood remains vulnerable.

Keywords: Tourism, livelihood, coping strategy, culinary business, COVID-19

ABSTRAK

Selama masa pandemic COVID-19, keberlanjutan mata pencaharian dari industri yang berkaitan dengan pariwisata mengalami keterpurukan. Usaha kecil dan menengah, termasuk didalamnya usaha kuliner, berjuang untuk mencari cara agar dapat bertahan pada masa pandemi. Strategi Coping diharapkan mampu membantu pengusaha dalam mempertahankan mata pencaharian selama krisis berlangsung. Karena itu, strategi untuk bertahan menghadapi krisis menjadi isu penting untuk ditelaah. Penelitian ini menampilkan bukti empiris tentang penerapan coping strategy dengan studi kasus para usaha kuliner di Salatiga, Provinsi Jawa Tengah, Indonesia. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, penelitian ini menyelidiki tentang strategi dari pengusaha kuliner untuk bertahan pada masa pandemi COVID-19. Pengambilan data menggunakan metode interview, observasi dan studi dokumen. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa walaupun pengusaha kuliner saat ini dapat bertahan pada masa pandemi, mereka harus berjuang untuk mempertahankan mata pencaharian mereka. Karena itu, keberlanjutan mata pencaharian industri pariwisata masih berada dalam kondisi rentan karena akhir dari pandemi sendiri masih belum dapat diprediksi.

Kata kunci: Pariwisata, mata pencaharian, bisnis kuliner, COVID-19

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable tourism development highlights the importance of local people as one of important stakeholders in development (UNWTO, 2020). However, studies on sustainable tourism development has focussed on how to sustain tourism industry (Blackstock, 2005; Lasso & Dahles, 2018) rather than examining the capability of local people to sustain their livelihood. Whilst, relying livelihood solely on tourism is risky because tourism-based livelihoods are highly affected by external factors such as such seasonality in tourism activity, issues related to safety, security, and social economy conflicts, as well as crises (Dahles & Susilowati, 2015; Kim & Jamal, 2015; Lasso & Dahles, 2018; Wang & Yotsumoto, 2018). The COVID 19 pandemic is the most current crisis that has put the livelihood of tourism-based entrepreneurs in danger.

A livelihood is sustainable when people can cope with and recover from stress and shocks and are able to extend livelihoods for the next generation (Chambers & Conway, 1992). The stability of local livelihood is affected by external situations such as shocks, seasonality, or negative trends. The COVID 19 pandemic is one of the shocks that disrupt local livelihood, and the businesspeople need to apply strategies to cope with the crisis. Coping strategies are created by maximizing the potential aspect that people can do and minimizing the risk that they may receive. Chambers & Conway (1992) explained that people may apply the strategies by stinting, hoarding, protecting, depleting, diversifying, claiming, and moving.

In developing nations like Indonesia, entrepreneurs who run their businesses in the form of Micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) still play a significant role in national development. They are the main driving force of economic growth with more than 50% contribution of national income (ILO, 2019; Tambunan, 2006), while providing significant employment, protecting national heritage, and conveying cultural knowledge towards visitors (al Haija, 2011; Kim & Jamal, 2015; Komppula, 2014).

However, tourism-based MSMEs, which are commonly run as informal family or personal business (Dahles, 2002; Kim & Jamal, 2015), often face numerous difficulties such as limited knowledge to navigate a business, dependent on the tourism activity to gain sales, lack of experience to prepare facing threats in tourism industries, and lack of financial support (Dahles & Susilowati, 2015; Singh et al., 2007). The challenges are aggravated due to vulnerable characteristics of tourism (Banki et al., 2016; Koh & Hatten, 2002), particularly when the COVID 19 pandemic spread. This pandemic has brought problems that cause the livelihood of tourism-based entrepreneurs in danger.

Salatiga is an emerging urban tourism destination with authentic culinary attractions. The popularity of Salatiga culinary has been significantly boosted since the town was nominated as Indonesia's City of Gastronomy. The town gains more popularity as Mr Sandiaga Uno, the Indonesian Minister of Tourism and Creative Economics, fully supports Salatiga to become a UNESCO Creative Cities Network as Gastro History City (Berita7.online, 2021). This popularity has encouraged growth in Salatiga Culinary business. It is estimated that more than 6000 culinary SMEs are involved in the tourism industries in Salatiga. The growth of culinary businesses cannot be separated from the existence of three big universities with more than 40.000 active students from numerous towns and cities across Indonesia that contribute to the number of visitors in Salatiga. However, the pandemic also disrupts the good progress of restaurants and cafés businesses in Salatiga. Significant decline in Salatiga tax income from the hotel and restaurant industries to 10 billion Rupiah or close to 80% in 2020 (Salatiga, 2021; Santoso, 2020), indicate the struggle that the local culinary business is facing.

Studies on tourism-based entrepreneurs during the COVID-19 pandemic have paid a lot of attentions to the emerging problems and strategies to secure their businesses (Chowdhury et al., 2020; Gössling et al., 2020; Irawan, 2020; Nicola et al., 2020; Tungkup, 2021). Numbers of studies on strategies to survive the pandemic focus more on elaborating strategies from management perspectives (Chowdhury et al., 2020; Irawan, 2020; Irawan, 2020; Santoso, 2020; Nicola et al., 2020; Tungkup, 2021). As the end of the pandemic remains unpredictable, a holistic analysis is needed to examine the capability of local entrepreneurs to sustain their livelihood and endure through the pandemic. Addressing this issue, this study

elaborates culinary entrepreneurs' strategies to respond COVID-19 pandemic; examining on whether or not the strategies assist them in surviving the pandemic. So doing, this study will contribute to the ongoing debate of tourism development on the sustainability of local livelihoods.

METHOD

Place and time of research

Salatiga is chosen to be the research setting because the city is gaining more popularity as the city of gastronomy and the culinary businesses are growing. The data were collected in 2021, from August to November. This was the time when COVID 19 brought devastating impacts to culinary businesses in Salatiga.

Method

This article is based on a qualitative approach with constructivist views to study participants' perspectives in facing the COVID-19 pandemic on their culinary businesses (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The participants of this research are the café and restaurant owners, involving 5 café owners and 6 restaurant owners. The data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and document studies. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) is applied to examine the interviews and observation reports. Interviews are recorded and carefully transcribed. Thematic analysis is used to analyze the data from the field. The interview is transcribed and coded to collect small themes. Later the data is classified into several small themes and associated with the bigger theme. The bigger theme is submitted to the matrix and compared and contrasted with the other data collected.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Introducing Culinary Business in Salatiga

Culinary has been one of Salatiga's main attractions. National and international culinary-related events have been organized by universities, local government, and private sectors in the form of musical events, photography contests, intercultural parades, and many other campus activities. These events have played an important role in attracting visitors to come. Besides visitors, the presence of more than 40.000 university students at the end of 2019 in Salatiga has become a significant market for these local culinary businesses. As a result, the culinary business in Salatiga has been growing fast. In 2020, it is estimated that around 6000 culinary entrepreneurs are involved in the industry (Berita7.online, 2021). Coffee shops and restaurants are among the culinary businesses that significantly increase.

The coffee shop business is a growing business. The early period of the coffee shop business in Salatiga was initiated by a small number of entrepreneurs who run their small-scale coffee shops in Salatiga. Owners commonly run their coffee shops as a small-scale and informal business. In 2011, it is estimated that there were fewer than 5 coffee shops in Salatiga but there were more than 20 coffee shops in 2019. The business keeps growing in line with the increase in coffee popularity. Coffee shop owners utilize this momentum to gain a larger market, particularly youngsters. Two out of five small coffee shops in Salatiga are evolving into café and eateries. They do not only serve beverages but also offer food and snacks with better facilities in their stalls in order to create a comfortable atmosphere to hang out. Coffee shop businesses in Salatiga reach their peak season in 2019 and university students and family become their main market.

Restaurant business have also become a prominent growing culinary industry in Salatiga. Similar to the coffee shop business, the restaurant business in Salatiga was established by a small number of entrepreneurs who run their restaurants in Salatiga. Restaurant owners run their business as a small-scale and informal business. It is reported that restaurants in Salatiga have grown significantly since there were only 20 restaurants in 2012 and it reached 94 restaurants in 2019 (Statistik, 2021). Currently, the restaurant business in Salatiga has evolved, targeting families and youngsters like students as their main market. Thus, more restaurants are evolving from venues that only serve food and beverages into tourism destinations that offer other attractions outside food and beverages. Therefore, restaurants are not simply the place for eating, but also the place to spend a relaxing time with family and friends.

However, the good run of the coffee shop and restaurant businesses in Salatiga are significantly disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the spread of the pandemic in 2020, these businesses have received unexpected impacts that deteriorate their businesses sharply.

2. Culinary Business in Midst of COVID-19 Pandemic

In running the business, culinary business owners in Salatiga face numerous constraints, such as difficulties to accessing fundamental facilities to run their business (water, land, natural resources, etc.) and limited capacity of human resources that capable to support the business (Krisnawati et al., 2019). The COVID 19 pandemic has made the difficulties become worse. When the pandemic struck, local government applied numerous regulations to limit people's mobility and social interaction. People are pushed to stay at home. As a result, people are not allowed to visit public places including coffee shops and restaurants.

The mentioned situations inevitably cause a significant decrease in the number of visitors to culinary businesses in Salatiga. This condition hits the culinary businesses hard as such businesses highly depend on the number of visitors as their main source of income. Participants claimed that during the pandemic, their income has declined as much as 60% to 95% every month. This unfortunate situation is well described by Mr Imam, a restaurant owner:

“During the first month, I received nothing from my restaurant because of the pandemic. The pandemic really devastated my business. From what I saw on TV, the end of this pandemic is far from the end. I calculated the impact from another country, and I thought I could not run this business any longer in this place.”

This problem has inevitably triggered a string of further problems, such as difficulties in paying the loan and the business' operational cost, and they also suffer a cash flow shortage. Five out of eleven participants begin their businesses by having a loan from banks or relatives, which makes them depend fully on sales performance to pay the instalment. The absence of customer leads to failure in instalment payment. Nine participants run out of financial capital to meet the operational costs, like employees' salary, monthly bills, and

marketing budget. Seven participants claim that they do not own enough cash flow to maintain the business.

Such problems are aggravated as prices of ingredients increase significantly and, worse, ingredients are expired due to delays in delivering process. Tian, a restaurant owner, claims he suffers a great number of losses as the prices in the market keeps increasing. In his words:

“The situation was unstable brother, that during the pandemic all the prices are increasing from time to time. On the other hand, we cannot simply cut our expenses, also while considering that we have to keep opening our store.

As majority of these businesses are self-employed or family-owned ones, the owners have to fight very hard to keep their business running. Problems emerge due to COVID 19 can be seen in Table 2.

3. Securing Livelihood During the Pandemic

Responding to the crisis, culinary entrepreneurs are setting up some strategies to reduce and anticipate further deteriorating conditions because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Both groups perform similar strategies to secure their source of income during the pandemic.

3.1. Cost Reduction

The first strategy to secure livelihood during the pandemic is to reduce costs in their culinary businesses. Eight out of eleven participants have no other option but to reduce the number of their employees in order to lower the salary expense. These businesspeople optimize the remaining employees to handle multiple posts during their working hours. Government rules to shorten the operational hours has somehow assisted these entrepreneurs in reducing the cost. Following the rules, the salary of their employees is also adjusted according to the sum up of their total working hours.

Cost reduction is also applied through adjustment in ingredients or seasonings purchase. They used to use different ingredients for each dish they cook. During the pandemic, they purchase cheaper ingredients and they use these ingredients for multiple cuisines.

Closing branch outlet is a common strategy that culinary entrepreneurs implement to manage their cash flow balance and secure their business (Dayour et al., 2020; Gössling et al., 2020; Nicola et al., 2020; Shafi et al., 2020). In order to reduce production cost, seven participants decide to temporarily close their main and branch outlet. So doing, business people are able to reduce significant amount of daily and monthly expenses, such as ingredients purchase and salary, while waiting for better situation.

Moving to different place is one of the coping strategies to maintain livelihood (Chambers & Conway, 1992). In the case of culinary businesspeople in Salatiga, similar

strategy is also apply, however, it is implemented for different reason. One participant decides to move his business to his personal house to reduce rent expense. The businessman claims that he could not afford to pay the renting fee because he did not receive any customers visit during the first month of the pandemic outbreak in Salatiga.

The strategies applied by these participants are common strategies to survive the pandemic. Business owners commonly reduce remuneration on employees, terminate casual workers and contract staffs and make an agreement with employees not to receive any payment for some period of time (Alves et al., 2020). Such strategies assist the entrepreneurs to some extent. However, these people are not sure whether they have enough capability to endure until the pandemic is over.

3.2. Finance Management

The culinary businesspeople in Salatiga also face cash-flow shortage, one common problem during the pandemic. Therefore, finance management is another important strategy as finance plays vital role in culinary business. These businesspeople put their utmost effort to strengthen their financial capital to keep the business running.

Three participants have to utilize their personal saving to cover their business expenses. However, there is a limit in relying on this strategy as the amount of saving is also limited. For participants who own more than one business, depending on their other source of income is helpful to some extent. So doing, they can temporarily rely on the additional income as their backup cash to run their business activities. To keep the cash flow well, one participant has to lend some money from a bank to pay shop rent. Another participant decides to sell his assets to anticipate any emergency expenses.

They need to make sure that they have adequate cash flow since there are numerous responsibilities to meet such as paying bills, salaries for the employees, and accommodating routine business expenses. The need for adequate cash flow increases due to potential emergency expenses related to the pandemic, such as purchasing medicine and undergoing medical treatment for employees and families infected by the COVID-19 virus. Four participants utilize their personal cash flow to pay their business expenses. To make sure that they have sufficient fund to pay all operational cost, two participants pay their employees' salary in instalment. Others reduce the employees' salary as they reduce the employees' working hours.

When these entrepreneurs consume their saving and/or sell their assets to keep the cash flow, they apply deplete strategy: drawing upon household stores of food, pledge or sell assets to sustain their livelihood (Chambers & Conway, 1992). However, still, there are limits in utilizing their saving and assets, particularly to survive this unpredictable pandemic.

3.3. Adjustments

The participants implement some adjustments to respond to the changes that emerge due to COVID-19 pandemic. Under health protocol regulation, the culinary businesspeople are required to adjust their stores to be allowed to receive customers. The adjustments cover tangible and intangible aspects. In the physical adjustments, business owners rearrange the

seating layout to accommodate safety seating space regulation for their dine in customers and provide health facilities like temperature guns, hand washing spots, and hand sanitizers.

Due to COVID 19 pandemic, people become more concern about intangible factors like health and safety. These businesspeople adjust their intangible aspect to meet the customers' need. They create an image of their place as healthy and safe place to visit. To fulfill this demand, these businesspeople pursue Cleanliness, Healthy, Safety and Environment sustainability (CHSE) certificate from the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy to increase customers' trust to visit his store.

Further adjustments have been made through innovations to adapt with emerging changes. Seven out of eleven participants provide delivery services as customers are forbidden to visit their place. They also use this opportunity to offer tailor-made orders to increase sales. Another innovation is made by opening a branch near their market to anticipate the mobility limitation regulation. These strategies are able to temporarily increase their sales, however, these businesspeople still need to anticipate potential changes that may appear during the pandemic.

The entrepreneurs implement livelihood diversification to find a new source of income. People are expected to increase their capability to sustain their livelihood through diversification (Chambers & Conway, 1992). Mr Indra decides to diversify his business by opening different types of culinary businesses. However, he later has no other option but to close the new businesses due to the low number of customer visit.

Initiating a new business outside culinary is another diversification strategy. One participant runs a catfish business while keeping his culinary business. He supplies catfish to the nearest culinary businesses and traditional market in Salatiga. By becoming catfish supplier this businessman manages to reduce his reliance on culinary customers and his market is enlarged, covering other culinary businesses and sellers in traditional market.

These businesspeople implement two types of diversification: diversifying within culinary business and diversifying by adding a non-culinary business. Although diversification is recommended as an effective strategy to sustain livelihood (Chambers & Conway, 1992; Dahles & Susilowati, 2015), the first diversification strategy does not give significant assistance in sustaining livelihood. This condition happens due to the new businesses are still in culinary area and they still rely on similar culinary market, which are highly impacted by the pandemic. This situation confirms the danger of a complete dependence in relying their income only on tourism (Dahles, 2002; Lasso & Dahles, 2018; Tao & Wall, 2009). On the contrary, those who combine tourism-based and non-tourism-based businesses increase their capability to sustain their livelihood as they have (Adams et al., 2021; Alves et al., 2020; Gössling et al., 2020; Shafi et al., 2020; Tao and Wall, 2009).

Doing casual jobs apart from the culinary industry becomes a temporary strategy to gain additional cash. The entrepreneurs apply this strategy to meet their daily needs while waiting for situations to be better. The casual jobs function adequately as a day-to-day survival strategy, however, they do not increase the businesspeople's capability to maintain their livelihood in a long run.

Above mentioned strategies show that the culinary businesspeople implement coping strategy: as a parameter to secure the livelihood when people are facing stresses and shocks

(Chambers and Conway, 1992). Such strategies have been recorded to increase the capability of tourism entrepreneurs to cope with the crises due to earthquake (Dahles & Susilowati, 2015). However, in the COVID-19 pandemic issue, the end of the pandemic is nearly far sight. These entrepreneurs still struggle to maintain their business at the same level because each business entity has their own capacity to bear the burden of laying on the minimum level of business performance. They may potentially run out of time and capital while the end of pandemic remains unpredictable (Alves et al., 2020; Chowdhury et al., 2020; Dayour et al., 2020; Gössling et al., 2020; Nicola et al., 2020; Shafi et al., 2020). What has been done by these culinary entrepreneurs is not enough due to limited capacity to run their business through the uncertainty. Businesses that do not have long term endurance in coping with the pandemic will end up with a business closure (Adams et al., 2021; Alves et al., 2020; Dayour et al., 2020; Gössling et al., 2020). Participants in this research survive the pandemic to some extent. Therefore, as the end of pandemic is still unpredictable, their livelihood remains vulnerable.

CONCLUSION

The case of culinary entrepreneurs in Salatiga shows that they implement cost reduction, finance management, and adjustment as their coping strategies. The first two strategies are applied only to keep the business running while avoiding business closure. Adjustment strategy, consisting of innovations and diversifications, succeed to maintain sales and give additional cash temporarily. These coping strategies appear to assist the culinary businesspeople in surviving the pandemic to some extent. However, such strategies only function as temporary strategies. The strategies fail to increase culinary entrepreneurs' capability to endure the crisis in a long run as their livelihood remains vulnerable whilst the end of pandemic is still unpredictable.

Learning from culinary businesspeople in Salatiga, relying solely on coping strategies to maintain livelihood during long-term crisis is not adequate. Survival strategies have to be applied in parallel with long-term efforts to strengthen their livelihood to anticipate similar crisis in the future. Future studies on sustaining livelihood during crisis should focus more on elaboration of both short-term and long-term strategies.

Note: In order to protect research participants' privacy, all the names used here are pseudonyms

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Table 2. Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Culinary Businesses in Salatiga

Name of Participants	Culinary Category	Impacts during the COVID-19 pandemic		
		Significant Income Decrease		
		Problems in Paying Loan	Problems in Operational Cost	Problems in cash flow
Andre	Restaurant		√	√
Imam	Restaurant		√	√
Salim	Restaurant	√		
Tari	Restaurant	√	√	√
Tian	Restaurant		√	√
Bagus	Restaurant		√	
Jaka	Coffee shop		√	√
Eko	Coffee shop	√	√	
Indra	Coffee shop		√	
Reza	Coffee shop			√
Anto	Coffee shop		√	√

Source: Data processing (2021)