

The Roles of Innovation and Government Support on Tourism Entrepreneurs' Business Performance during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Purpose: The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has created a global crisis which has been devastating in terms of health, the economy and social well-being. Tourism entrepreneurs in Malaysia have also been negatively impacted, having faced substantial falls in their business performance. Thus, tourism entrepreneurs must recover and reemerge for their businesses to survive and be sustainable in the long term. This study attempts to examine the roles of innovative behaviour and government support on tourism entrepreneurs' performance.

Methodology: This study employed quantitative data using a purposive sampling technique. Data was collected from tourism entrepreneurs in the Cameron Highlands, Malaysia. The data was then analysed using SPSS .

Findings: The findings of this study demonstrate how the roles of innovative behaviour and government support are positively related to the business performance of tourism entrepreneurs.

Practical Implication: The study provides valuable contributions to help understand how innovation and government support could help tourism businesses to recover after the impact of the pandemic in their business performance.

Originality: This study focus on tourism entrepreneurs and examines the roles played by innovative behaviour and government support in enhancing the performance of tourism entrepreneur during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Keywords: tourism entrepreneur, innovation, innovative behaviour, government support, business performance.

Introduction

The tourism industry has become a prime source of income for individuals and tourism operators. Unfortunately, in 2020, the progress and success of the tourism industry were heavily affected by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic has affected the health of many people and become a major cause of deaths worldwide. Furthermore, the

COVID-19 pandemic has also become a serious threat to the economy and the financial markets generally, including players in the tourism sector (Tran et al., 2020).

The sudden enforcement of the MCO by the Malaysian government placed various sectors of the economy in jeopardy (Murugiah, 2020). In only the first two months following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the tourism industry in Malaysia lost RM3.37 billion (Dzulkifly, 2020). The increasing number of COVID-19 cases in Malaysia led to the cancellation of tour programmes and a subsequent substantial drop in the number of tourists in Malaysia (Shah et al., 2020). This situation worsened, lasting for over a year, which later caused small businesses and medium-sized enterprises to close (Cheng, 2020). This was because most small businesses could not remain sustainable and had close for some months. Meanwhile, they couldn't retain or hire many employees, causing many people to lose their jobs.

According to Jaafar et al, (2011), tourism industry faced various challenges such as lack of experience and business skills and lack of financial resources. This has provide an issue for the tourism entrepreneur to develop and prosper in tourism business. The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic has impacted further the development of tourism entrepreneur. Despite the difficulty of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism entrepreneurs must rebound and rebuild their businesses. As such, they are seeking support and opportunities to sustain their businesses. Therefore, this study examined the roles of innovation and the government support on the business performance of tourism entrepreneurs in Malaysia.

Literature Review

Tourism Entrepreneurs

Tourism entrepreneurship has been defined as providing tourism products involving transport, accommodation, catering, entertainment and other facilities or services such as shops, money changer and other tour operators (Sinclair, 1998). This also means that a person or a group can be considered tourism entrepreneurs if they produce and/or manage tourism products (Sinclair and Stabler, 1997). Therefore, the term tourism entrepreneur covers a variety of business traits and processes that support the tourism sector. The tourism business sector has evolved over time by supporting the nation economic development (Biswas & Mohamed, 2018).

The tourism sector plays an important role in business development related to the hospitality and leisure industries. Tourism entrepreneurship encompasses a wide range of activities related to the elements needed to create and operate a legal tourist enterprise (Shaw and William, 2009). Tourism sector can grow sustainably through the creative and innovative implementation of business approaches (Shaw & William, 2009). In mean time, the tourist enterprise refers to a business that operates on a profit basis and seeks to satisfy tourists' needs (Saayman, 1999). Besides that, tourism businesses are initiated by entrepreneurs for the purpose of providing leisure and recreational opportunities for tourists (Chang, 2011). In addition, tourism sector mostly relied on the new or start up business that offered products or services based for tourist (Biswas & Mohamed, 2018).

The tourism business has been recognised as a principal aspect of economic expansion and progress in developing countries, such as Malaysia. This small type of business emphasized on skills and unique characteristic to run the tourism business (Biswas & Mohammad, 2018). Accordingly, the income generated by the tourism sector mostly depended on the international tourist (Sanchez-Rivero & Pulido-Fernandez (2020). In 2019, travel and tourism sector

contributed more than 10% to global Malaysian GDP (MOTAC, 2020). In addition, the tourism businesses could assist Malaysia's economy by reducing unemployment among different age groups, especially educated youths (Nongsiej & Shimray, 2017). Therefore, societal problems can be eliminated, the fiscal growth and development of the country would improve and the GDP of Malaysia would rise (Nongsiej & Shimray, 2017).

Innovative Behaviour

Innovation is a key characteristic of entrepreneurs, most of whom are involved in creativity and innovation (Hakimian et al, 2015). Historically, innovative behaviour refers to the introduction and application of new ideas and procedures to a person's work role and/or an organisation (Schumpeter, 1934). Chen and Huang (2009) further mentioned that innovation are also related with strategic human resources and knowledge of a firm. As such, the dimension of innovation was broaden to covered various activities related to management and business.

Management research on innovative behaviour focuses more on the human aspect compared to the conventional innovation that preferred on product development (Yuan & Woodman, 2010). Examples of innovative behaviour in the workplace include introducing new technologies and techniques, suggesting new ways to achieve objectives, trying new ways of performing work tasks and facilitating the implementation of new ideas (Zakaria et al., 2016). Innovative behaviour involves organisational characteristics, working environment characteristics and individual characteristics, while the consequences of innovative behaviour include higher productivity, higher rates of burnout, more job satisfaction, organisational problem, greater organisational commitment and more organisational effectiveness (Ariyasinghe & Shin, 2018). In addition, innovation in a business organisation involves providing products, services and processes that enable the company to grow and survive (Khorakian et al., 2018). Therefore, innovative behaviour plays an important role in enhancing employee performance and productivity.

The core insight of entrepreneurship involved the belief that innovation always aligned with benefits (Rosenbusch et al., 2011). Thus, innovativeness and entrepreneurship are deem important. This is due to entrepreneur must always be innovative as they need to produce novel ideas in commercializing their product and services (Sandberg et al., 2013). With regard to innovation in the context of entrepreneur, they need to be innovative in managing their business. Entrepreneur believe that they must think and act innovatively if they want to be competitive and further enlarge their business (Pobleto, 2017). Thus, innovative behavior among tourism entrepreneur is needed to enhance their business productivity and performance.

Government Support

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic forced governments worldwide to introduce lockdowns in an attempt to curb the spread of the virus which affected many aspects of these countries. Governments worldwide have implemented economic and tax relief packages to help business owners and employees mitigate the impact of the lockdown measures (Steenkamp, 2020). The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) developed various strategies, such as offering additional time for dealing with tax affairs, enhancing taxpayer services and introducing communication initiatives (OECD, 2020).

In Malaysia, government business support services (GBSS) have worked closely alongside government policies and introduced a number of transformations to suit the current needs of

SMEs and the overall business environment (Yusoff & Yaakob, 2010). In February 2020, the Malaysian government provided an emergency package to counter the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and it was intended to, for instance, spur economic growth, promote investments and encourage businesses to adopt automation and digitalisation (Medina, 2020). The government of Malaysia also restructured and rescheduled loans by asking financial institutions to provide financial relief to borrowers by rescheduling or restructuring loans and offering extra payment periods from March 1, 2020 to December 31, 2020 (Medina, 2020). Meanwhile, the government also prepared an additional support in term of upgrading the micro-credit scheme for small and medium-sized enterprises in the tourism industry in a way to assist them to survive during the pandemic (The Star, 2021). Tax exemption and deferments were also provided by the government to benefit travel agencies, hotels and airlines, while businesses in the tourism industry could defer their monthly tax instalments for six months, starting April 1, 2020 (Medina, 2020). The government also provided one-off assistance of RM3000.00 to tourism operators as a stimulus package for them to build up again their business (BERNAMA, 2021). Thus, government support in term of financial aid are crucial for tourism entrepreneur during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Entrepreneur Business Performance

Business performance is important for a firm's survival and sustainability. In mean time, the entrepreneurial activity affects the performance of a every firm. In addition, performance in business is considered as part of business competitiveness. Most of firm will focus on their business performance in a way to increase their competitive advantages. Lingsiya (2012) stated that business performance is a complex and consist of multiple indicators such as growth in profitability and income, employee retention and customer satisfaction.

The entrepreneurial activity are depended on national economy whereby they can be productive or sometime being unproductive which affect their performance (Baumol, 1990). Meanwhile, Kriese et al. (2021) stated that activities under entrepreneurship could be known as a tool to improve the entrepreneur productivity. COVID-19 will likely compound the erosion caused by weakening the fundamental drivers of firm performance (Dieppe et al., 2020). In meantime, the COVID-19 pandemic has had major effects on business, causing lower productivity and affect the entire performance of a company (Shen et al., 2020). However, a good environmental support may lead to a positive outcome of increase in productivity and performance (Ostapenko, 2015). Therefore, entrepreneur need to focus in increasing their performance as a way to survive in business.

Social Exchange Theory

According to social exchange theory (SET), the action of an individual is motivated by certain exchange either in terms of economic or social exchange (Janssen, 2000). Economic exchange refers to a formal transactional contract which is based on a calculated basis while social exchange relates to the relationship of trust for unspecified future obligation by both parties. According to Vinarski-Peretz and Carmeli (2011), social exchange also occurred in situations when a person felt that they were cared for by other people. As such, when a person felt attached to an organization, they must repay it in terms of showing better performance. Based on SET perspective, members of an organization engage in social interaction that generates an obligation by one party to reciprocate the action of the other party because they perceived the relationship as beneficial (Xerri, 2013). As such, when entrepreneur was supported by the government, they will demonstrate innovative behavior and increase their performance.

The relationship between innovative behaviour and business performance

Innovation at work is a process that requires interaction between workers, whereby they support each other and enhance novel ideas that could be adopted by the a firm (Carmeli et al., 2006). A study showed that innovative behaviour depends on the work content and is positively related to the performance of a business (Amabile et al, 1996). Several studies demonstrated the existence of a positive relationship between innovation, productivity and performance of a firm (Cassiman and Golovko, 2011). Thus, innovation efforts can transform company productivity by, for instance, increasing a firm's performance, improving the products offered and reducing production costs (Hall, 2011). Innovation can be regarded as the result of entrepreneurial searches for new products, new processes and new organisational structures (Schumpeter, 1934). In meantime, innovative work behavior is clearly intended to provide benefit to the person or firm (Jong & Hartog, 2010). Therefore, innovative behavior are deemed to have a positive relationship with firm's performance.

The relationship between government support and business performance

Government support are important for most of business firm. Companies and enterprises receiving government support will increase their R&D and thus improve their productivity and performance (Hu, 2001). Accordingly, they found that government support significantly affect innovation and performance of a firm. Beside that, the government support will stimulate research and innovation in various sectors and entities performing below the socially optimal level. Thus, the government can assist entrepreneurs by either supporting their financial capability or promoting their business. In addition, subsidies provided by the government may promote a firm's adoption of innovative activities to improve their performance and efficiency. Therefore, this study postulate a positive relationship between government support and business performance of tourism entrepreneur.

Hypothesis Development

This study postulated the hypothesis as followed:

H1: There is a positive relationship between innovative behavior and performance of tourism entrepreneurship.

H2: There is positive relationship between government support and performance of tourism entrepreneurship.

Methodology

The target population for this study were tourism entrepreneurs in Cameron Highlands. The data about registered tourism entrepreneurs was obtained from Majlis Daerah Cameron Highlands (MDCH) in Cameron Highlands, Pahang (MDCH, 2020). This register listed 6860 registered companies in 2020. This study however employed the G Power analysis to obtained the number of minimum sample size. By that, the minimum total sample size needed was only 100. Due to movement limitations during the MCO, this study opted for an online survey using an online questionnaire. 200 questionnaire were distributed to the targeted respondent. Only 100 completed questionnaire were used for data analysis which amounted to 50% of response rate.

The questionnaire was created using Google Forms and the link was sent via WhatsApp and email. The contact information about the respondents was obtained from the list provided by Majlis Daerah Cameron Highlands. A short message was written to inform respondents of the study's purpose and the reasons why the researchers approached them. Respondents were politely requested to participate in the questionnaire by clicking the link given. In this research,

the purposive sampling method was used to collect the data due to the restriction of movement. This study targeted the respondent must be the owner or managing officer that run a business related to tourism sector.

The questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first section concerned the respondents' demographic profiles. It included information such as gender, nationality and highest level of education. The second section related to questions on innovative behaviour, government support and the productivity of tourism entrepreneurs. The items for innovative behaviour was adapted from Yuan And Woodman (2010), items for government support was adapted from Arasti, Pavishe and Motavaseli (2012) and items for business performance was adopted from Lingesiya (2012). All the items were rephrased to match the current study that focus on tourism entrepreneur context. Each of the items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale. The participants were asked to rate each of the statement ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Analysis and Findings

Data for this research was gathered through a Google Forms Survey. It was coded and analysed using the computerised SPSS (Statistical Software Package for Social Science) software. From the data gathered, 76% of the respondents were male and 24% were female. All the respondents were conducting business related to tourism activities in Cameron Highlands, Pahang. For the majority, the highest level of education achieved was elementary/primary school, which applied to 36%. Most respondents (80%) only earned \leq RM0 - RM1000 in salary per week during the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of them offered tourism business products and services. The most common type of business by percentage was tourist attractions (49%), souvenir vendors (29%), food and restaurant services (27%), vegetable vendors (19%), fruit vendors (18%) and plant vendors (16%).

Descriptive analysis was used to describe the basic features of data in this research. This produced a simple summary of the sample and measures. Validity and reliability were used to test the goodness of measure. Reliability refers to the consistency of the measure and reflects the consistency over time. Nunally's rule of thumb recommends a minimum alpha value of 0.7 to be considered to be reliable (Nunally, 1978).

Correlation analysis was conducted between innovative behaviour and productivity, showing a significance of 0.418. The relationship between government behaviour and productivity was 0.572. The results showed that the R-square of this study was 0.471, representing 47.1% of the variation factors for productivity. The result of multiple Regression 1 showed that collinearity problems did not exist as the variance inflation factors (VIF) values were below 10; mostly were above 4. The results also showed that all the independent variables in this research were not correlated with each other and no multicollinearity problem occurred.

The multiple regression analysis indicated that the following tested variables were highly significant. The results indicated that the innovative behavior behaviour and government support were positively related to the productivity of tourism entrepreneurs during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Therefore, based on Table 1, hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 2 were supported in this study.

Hypothesis	Description	B	Standard d-error	Beta	T-value	Result
1.	Innovative Behaviour > Performance	0.276	0.086	0.275	1.197	Accepted
2.	Government Support > performance	0.510	0.090	0.490	1.655	Accepted

Table 1: Hypothesis Result

Discussion

This study showed the positive relationship between the innovative behaviour of tourism entrepreneurs and business performance, which indicated the relationship that the entrepreneurs had with business performance during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, the results from this study aligned with a previous study by Yuan and Woodman (2015). Therefore, it was demonstrated that innovative behaviour was important for tourism entrepreneur to survive in their business. Tourism entrepreneurs needed to develop new business ideas and products to survive this critical situation, which later increased their performance.

Furthermore, this research also identified the positive role of government support in terms of how related to business performance during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was noted that government support had a positive relationships with performance during the COVID-19 pandemic. Various types of government support were offered to tourism businesses to help them manage during the pandemic, such as restructuring and rescheduling loans and asking financial institutions to provide financial relief to borrowers (Medina, 2020). Therefore, for a tourism entrepreneur to survive during and after the outbreak of the pandemic greatly depended on the support given by the government and other relevant authorities. Hence, the government and bodies related to tourism entrepreneurs must focus and provide beneficial support to the business operators.

Implications and Limitations

The evidence provided in this study indicates the importance of innovation and government support in enhancing tourism entrepreneurs' performance. Thus, this study suggests that the relevant ministries such as Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture that dealing with tourism and also entrepreneurship could form effective strategies by enhancing tourism entrepreneurs' innovative behaviour and increasing the levels of financial and social support. The right consideration and strategy could turn this devastating crisis into an opportunity for tourism entrepreneurs to expand and enhance their businesses. The current COVID-19 situation has created the demand for many new ideas that have been impactful on various businesses, such as rethinking the supply chain and redeploying staff. Tourism entrepreneurs also adopted some innovative ways to ensure they could survive this critical period. For example, most tourism entrepreneurs in the Cameron Highlands established services-based online businesses.

Furthermore, government support had a significant positive relationship with the performance of tourism businesses during COVID-19. Many companies closed and many workers were displaced as a result of the enforced lockdown. The government need to provide more support that would give tourism entrepreneurs the chance to recover and rebuild their businesses. Companies in the Cameron Highlands have faced precipitous drops in various forms of demand, which has impacted their sales and performance. Therefore, the wide range of support

provided by the government could help them to rebuild their businesses. For instance, the government of Malaysia prepared millions of money for micro-credit scheme to small businesses in the tourism industry to assist in their cash flow issues and help them survive the most critical period. Tourism discounts worth were also provided, as was a special income tax relief, to support the tourism industry.

This paper have several limitation. Firstly, the data was collected from one region of tourism destination due to constraint of movement during the phase of MCO in Malaysia. Secondly, this study only focus on several aspect of innovation and support from government. Future study could be conducted as to understand further any possible factors that could affect the business performance of tourism entrepreneur. Lastly, further study need to be done in looking at other factors that could affect tourism entrepreneur performance which is after the COVID-19 Pandemic. This will provide insights in understanding the issues faced by tourism entrepreneur and thereafter to prepare them to sustain their business in future.

Conclusion

Tourism business sector have been negatively impacted by the outbreak of COVID-19. Despite the challenges suffered by most tourism entrepreneurs in Malaysia, they need to rebuild and recover to survive in the industry. This study examined the roles of innovative behaviour and government support, regarded as vital ways to enhance tourism entrepreneurs' productivity. The findings illustrate that both these factors can be deemed important for helping tourism entrepreneurs to bring back the glorious moment of tourism sector and also to sustain their business in future.

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