

COVID-19 PANDEMIC: THE INTENTION OF SABAH TAMU BUSINESS OPERATORS TO STAY IN THE TAMU BUSINESS

Jaratin Lily, Sidah Idris, Abdul Rahman Yaakob,
Zuraidah Jamrin and Nurfarhana Mohd Saidi
Faculty of Business, Economics and Accountancy,
Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia

*Corresponding author's email:
jaratin@ums.edu.my

Received: 27 January 2021

Accepted: 12 October 2021

Keywords: Sabah tamu operator,
intention to stay, COVID-19 pandemic

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the tamu business operator's intention to stay in the current business due to the COVID-19 pandemic in the West Coast of Sabah. Overall, the mean score for the intention to stay in the tamu business was considered high with 3.95 mean scores. Using the ANOVA test, the findings indicated that only the length of years involved in tamu business showed a significant mean difference among the respondents. The post hoc test showed that those in the tamu business for more than six years have a higher statistically significant mean difference than those in the tamu business for 3 – 5 years, and two years and below. There was no statistically significant mean difference between those in the tamu business for two years and below and 3 – 5 years. The findings implied that most tamu operators relied on tamu as their primary business platform, especially those who have been operating their tamu business for a longer period. It might be difficult for them to leave their current business to venture into a new business that they are not familiar with. Therefore, the relevant authorities should provide appropriate supports to these affected tamu business operators.

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia's main goals, like those of other countries, are to increase work opportunities and eliminate poverty (Hatta & Ali, 2013; Mulok et al., 2012; Rodzi Embong et al., 2013; Samer et al., 2015; Siwar et al., 2016). Therefore,

Malaysia promoted entrepreneurship growth to achieve this strategy, as the development of entrepreneurship would contribute to job creation, economic development, poverty reduction, and other economic and social benefits (Hanafiah et al., 2016). Entrepreneurship can be described as the process of using market-based approaches to achieve specific social or economic objectives, to participate in business goals, and to pursue new opportunities (McCain, 2010; Tur-Porcar et al., 2018).

Sabah has undergone significant economic changes since gaining its independence. The consequences of these changes have an indirect effect on Sabah's entrepreneurial and business practices. In Sabah, its traditional market, *tamu*, serves as one of the platforms for entrepreneurial activity and growth for local people (Foo, 2018). Before the existence of supermarkets and shopping malls, *tamu* became a significant location for local farmers, fishermen, and hawkers to offer their products through barter trading, albeit on a tiny scale or monetary system. *Tamu* is also a social gathering spot where villagers exchange the most recent news. The greatest method for outsiders to learn about the culture and lifestyle of the natives is to visit the local market, also known as *tamu*, which is quickly becoming a tourist attraction. Kota Belud, Gaya Street, Kota Kinabalu, Tuaran, Tamparuli, and Putatan are all famous places to visit. The Gaya Street *tamu*, hosted on Sundays, attracts the most foreign visitors because it is located right in the heart of Kota Kinabalu city.

The year 2020 is indeed a tough time for Malaysia due to the COVID-19 pandemic. To date, COVID-19 has spread to over 100 countries, with many experiencing a sharp spike in new infections (Craven et al., 2020; WHO, 2020). In addition to threatening human life, the coronavirus is also likely to trigger an economic crisis. Analysts are currently predicting negative growth in all sectors of the economy, from plant and industry closures to

declining business investment and consumer spending. Owing to the rapid spread of COVID-19, most countries have introduced the Movement Control Order (MCO) to prevent the spread from getting worse. During the MCO, most companies have been ordered to temporarily suspend their business activities while the people were advised to remain at home to flatten the virus's spread. Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) have also been introduced accordingly.

Indeed, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the MCO implementation have greatly affected the small entrepreneurs, including *tamu* operators, who are struggling to maintain their current business. These circumstances have greatly affected the local *tamu* business operators after the National Security Council ordered the temporary closure of the *tamu* grounds of the affected districts. For example, the weekly *tamu* in Gaya Street has been badly affected after the government imposed MCO.

However, studies on entrepreneurs' intentions have been overlooked by researchers (Hanafiah et al., 2016). The intention is defined as an individual's cognitive state which is the most immediate and best predictor of that individual's subsequent behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). In other words, the intention is reflected as an individual's wish or plan to perform the planned action in future. Consequently, intentions could highlight individuals' directions regarding their future behaviour (Hanafiah et al., 2016; Koe et al., 2015; McCain, 2010). Thus, it could be stated that entrepreneurs' intentions (e.g. intention to remain in the current business) are the basis of their venture's future shape and performance.

On business outcomes, most previous studies have emphasised entrepreneurs' business performance (Souisa, 2018) and intention to become an entrepreneur (Koe et al., 2019; Samuel, 2013; Tsordia & Papadimitriou, 2015). One of the current studies that

investigate entrepreneurs' intentions is the study by Hanafiah et al. (2016), but the study is in the franchising industry. Besides, many previous studies mainly concentrate on SMEs' entrepreneurial activities at the firm level rather than an individual or sole proprietorship. In this case, there is a lack of study on intention in *tamu* business operators currently. Thus, this study aims to investigate the *tamu* operators' intention to remain in their current business in consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic and some restrictions from the government. The study results are expected to provide an insight into the local *tamu* business operators' intention to stay in their current business that can be used by the government agencies to soften the economic impact experienced by the *tamu* business operators through the introduction of appropriate policies and support programs. Hence, studying *tamu* business operators' intentions is essential to ensure their continued survival and future growth.

METHODOLOGY

The target population of analysis for this study was the *tamu* operators running *tamu* business activities in the West Coast of Sabah such as in Kota Kinabalu, Tuaran, Kota Belud and Ranau. Respondents were also asked to indicate their level of agreement/ disagreement to several statements relating to their intention to stay in the current business (see Table 1) due to the current COVID-19 pandemic using a five-point Likert scale ranging from "1 strongly disagree" to "5 strongly agree".

Table 1 Intention to stay in business construct

No.	Items
1	I am satisfied with my income from doing business at <i>tamu</i> .
2	I am satisfied with the working conditions at <i>tamu</i> .
3	I have high enthusiasm to do business at <i>tamu</i> .
4	I feel that I am enjoying my business activities at <i>tamu</i> .

Source: Demiral, 2018

The questionnaires were distributed to *tamu* operators at different *tamu* locations on the West Coast of Sabah. There were 123 questionnaires successfully collected for data analysis. Descriptive analysis was conducted to overview the respondents' profile towards their intention to remain in the current business. Two mean difference tests were then applied to investigate if there was any mean difference amongst the groups. Firstly, a *t*-test was conducted to determine if the two groups were statistically different from each other. Secondly, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to determine if three or more groups were statistically different.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Analysis

A total of 123 data from the distribution of a self-administered questionnaire to *tamu* operators was obtained (see Table 2). The analysis of the data through SPSS analysis revealed that the majority of the respondents were female (57.7%), married (69.9%), aged 36 and above (70.7), Bumiputera Sabah (66.7%), and in the business for the past 6 years and above (53.7%). Besides, the mean score for the intention of staying in *tamu* business was considered high with 3.95 mean scores in overall results. The profile breakdown of the mean score indicated that males (4.0) scored higher than the females (3.89), those whose ages range from 36 to 45 had the lowest mean (3.7), while those within the 15 – 25 year bracket had the highest mean score (3.94). Those respondents who were divorced had the highest mean score (4.0) in terms of marital status, whilst others in ethnicity showed the highest mean score (4.13). Meanwhile, those in the business for six years above indicated the highest mean score (3.9), while those in the business for two years and below scored the lowest mean (3.62).

Mean Difference Analysis

From Table 1, the mean intention to stay in the current business of males ($n = 52$) and females ($n = 71$) were 4.0 and 3.89, respectively. Meanwhile, Levene's test ($p = 0.8$) indicated that the groups' variances were statistically equal. At equal variances assumed, independent samples t -test ($p = 0.34$) indicated that the mean intention to stay in the current business of the male and female was statistically equal.

Based on the one-way ANOVA analysis, except for the length of years in *tamu* business, other respondents' characteristics have a statistically insignificant mean difference. From Table 1, the one-way ANOVA test results showed that the mean difference of three groups in a number of years in *tamu* business was found statistically significant ($p = 0.007$). These findings indicate that at least one of the pairs has a significantly different mean difference. Moreover, Levene's test for homogeneity was significant ($p = 0.002$). Therefore, the Games-Howell test was used for multiple comparisons, which showed that those in *tamu* business for more than six years have a statistically significant mean difference between two pairs, namely with those in the *tamu* business 3 – 5 years, and two years and

below. Meanwhile, there was no statistically significant mean difference between those in the *tamu* business for two years and below and 3 – 5 years.

On average, there is a relatively high intention to stay in the current business (regardless of the respondent's gender, age, marital status, and ethnicity). Family concerns could be one reason why those involved in the *tamu* business for a longer period have a significantly higher mean score on intention to stay in business than those in the business for five years and below to stay in business. These findings are consistent with some previous studies (Hanafiah, 2012, 2014), such as increasing family income and flexibility to accommodate both business and family matters. The findings also implied that most *tamu* operators relied on *tamu* as their primary business platform, especially those who have been running *tamu* business for a long time. Thus, it might be difficult for them to leave their current business to venture into a new business. Therefore, the relevant authorities should provide appropriate support (financial and non-financial) to help the *tamu* operators sustain their current businesses, mainly affected by the COVID-19 and MCO implementation.

TABLE 2: Findings of Analysis

Particular	Category	Freq. (%)	Mean	Homogeneity test	t-Test/ ANOVA test	Post-hoc test											
Overall			3.95														
Gender	Male	52 (47.3)	4.0	$F(0.064); p = 0.8$	$t(0.967), p = (0.34)$	-											
	Female	71 (57.7)	3.89														
Age	15 – 25 years	16 (13)	3.94	$F(1.747), p = 0.87$	$F(1.26), p = 0.29$	-											
	26 – 35 years	20 (16.2)	3.79														
	36 – 45 years	42 (34.1)	3.7														
	46 years and above	45 (36.6)	3.82														
Marital Status	Single	30 (24.4)	3.88	$F(0.775), p = 0.64$	$F(0.29), p = 0.747$	-											
	Married	86 (69.9)	3.97														
	Divorced	7 (5.7)	4.00														
Ethnicity	Bumiputra Sabah	82(66.7)	3.93	$F(2.081), p = 0.037$	$F(0.69), p = 0.5$	-											
	Chinese	27 (22)	3.93														
	Others	14 (11.4)	4.13														
Number of Year in Business	2 years and below	19 (15.4)	3.62	$F(3.102), p = 0.002$	$F(5.12), p = 0.007$	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="3">Games-Howell</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td rowspan="2">6 – 10 y</td> <td>3 – 5 y</td> <td>$p = 0.036$</td> </tr> <tr> <td>≤ 2 y</td> <td>$p = 0.064$</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3 – 5 y</td> <td>≤ 2 y</td> <td>$p = 0.924$</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Games-Howell			6 – 10 y	3 – 5 y	$p = 0.036$	≤ 2 y	$p = 0.064$	3 – 5 y	≤ 2 y	$p = 0.924$
	Games-Howell																
	6 – 10 y	3 – 5 y	$p = 0.036$														
≤ 2 y		$p = 0.064$															
3 – 5 y	≤ 2 y	$p = 0.924$															
3 – 5 years	38 (31)	3.68															
6 – 10 years	66 (53.7)	3.9															

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In conclusion, the *tamu* operator’s intention to stay in their current business is still high, regardless of the respondent’s gender, age, marital status, and ethnicity. Furthermore, the results also imply that most *tamu* operators rely on *tamu* as their primary business platform, particularly those operating *tamu* for a longer period. Therefore, it could be difficult for them to leave their current business to venture into a new business platform. Appropriate support both financial and non-financial should therefore be provided by the relevant authorities to support *tamu* operators in maintaining their existing operations, which are mainly affected by COVID-19 and MCO implementation.

The MCO imposed by the government had limited access to more respondents because the number of operators at *tamu* per day has been drastically reduced. This is due to a weekly rotation system among the *tamu* operators incorporated by the local authorities. Moreover, due to the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, some *tamu* operators were either reluctant or refused to participate in answering the questionnaires that were distributed manually. Thus, future research should involve *tamu* associations to get more respondents to participate without going to *tamu* for an on-site survey.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank Universiti Malaysia Sabah for supporting this work under the Skim Penyelidikan Dana Khas (SDK0218-2020).

REFERENCES

- Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50, 179 – 211.
- Craven, M., Mysore, M., Singhal, S., Smit, S., & Wilson, M. (2020). COVID-19: Briefing note. *McKinsey & Company* (Issue March). <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/risk/our-insights/covid-19-implications-for-business>
- Demiral, Ö. (2018). Commuting stress-turnover intention relationship and the mediating role of life satisfaction: An empirical analysis of Turkish employees. *Social Sciences*, 7 (9), 1 – 21. <https://doi.org/10.20944/preprints201807.0299.v1>
- Foo, J. (2018). Penglibatan komuniti tempatan dalam pasaran tumbuhan ubatan di tamu Pantai Barat Sabah [Involvement of local communities in the market of medicinal plants in the West Coast of Sabah]. *Akademika*, 88 (April), 35 – 47. <https://doi.org/10.17576/akad-2018-8801-03>
- Hanafiah, M. H. (2012). *The relationship between goal attainment and intention to remain in a franchise system in Malaysia*. University of Essex.
- Hanafiah, M. H. (2014). Does goal attainment shape perceived entrepreneurial success: A study of franchisee entrepreneur in Malaysia. *Proceeding: The 13th Eurasia Business and Economics Society (EBES) Conference*, 1587–1615.
- Hanafiah, M. H., Yousaf, S. U., & Hashim, N. A. (2016). Entrepreneurs' intention to invest in current business: An empirical study of Malaysian SME entrepreneurs. *Geografia - Malaysian Journal of Society and Space*, 12 (2), 119 – 131.
- Hatta, Z. A., & Ali, I. (2013). Poverty reduction policies in Malaysia: Trends, strategies and challenges. *Asian Culture and History*. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ach.v5n2p48>
- Koe, W. L., Alias, N. E., & Othman, R. (2019). Factors influencing the intention towards sustainable entrepreneurship among university students. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 9 (9), 182 – 191. <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v9-i9/6283>
- Koe, W. L., Omar, R., & Sa'ari, J. R. (2015). Factors influencing propensity to sustainable entrepreneurship of SMEs in Malaysia. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 172, 570 – 577. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.01.404>
- McCain, R. A. (2010). Entrepreneurship and small business. *Southern African Business Review*, 14 (3), 131 – 153. https://doi.org/10.1142/9789813231252_0004
- Mulok, D., Kogid, M., Asid, R., & Lily, J. (2012). Is economic growth sufficient for poverty alleviation? Empirical evidence from Malaysia. *Cuadernos de Economia*, 35 (97), 26 – 32. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0210-0266\(12\)70020-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0210-0266(12)70020-1)
- Rodzi Embong, M., Taha, R., & Mohd Nor, M. N. (2013). Role of zakat to eradicate poverty in Malaysia. *Jurnal Pengurusan*, 39, 141 – 150. <https://doi.org/10.17576/pengurusan-2013-39-13>
- Samer, S., Majid, I., Rizal, S., Muhamad, M. R., Halim, S., & Rashid, N. (2015). The impact of microfinance on poverty reduction: Empirical evidence from Malaysian perspective. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 195, 721 – 728. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.06.343>
- Samuel, Y. A. (2013). An assessment of entrepreneurship intention among Sunyani Polytechnic marketing students. *International Review of Management and Marketing*, 3 (1), 37 – 49.
- Siwar, C., Ahmed, F., Bashawir, A., & Mia, M. S. (2016). Urbanization and urban poverty in Malaysia: Consequences and vulnerability. *Journal of Applied Sciences*. <https://doi.org/10.3923/jas.2016.154.160>
- Souisa, W. (2018). The effects of entrepreneurial orientation and market orientation on business performance. *Journal of Entrepreneurship Education*, 21 (4), 210 – 222.
- Tsordia, C., & Papadimitriou, D. (2015). The role of theory of planned behavior on entrepreneurial intention of Greek business students. *International Journal of Synergy and Research*, 4 (1), 23. <https://doi.org/10.17951/ijsr.2015.4.1.23>
- Tur-Porcar, A., Roig-Tierno, N., & Llorca Mestre, A. (2018). Factors affecting entrepreneurship and business sustainability. *Sustainability*, 10 (2), 452. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su10020452>
- WHO. (2020). *Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak situation*. WHO. <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>