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## Covid-19 Pandemic: Intention to Stay of Sabah Tamu Operators in Tamu Business

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### Abstract

COVID-19 pandemic and Movement Control Order (MCO) implementation has affected businesses negatively. Therefore, this study investigates the intention to stay in the Tamu business amongst the Sabah Tamu operators. A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data by undertaking purposive and snowballing sampling using a cross-sectional study. Furthermore, the mean difference tests revealed that only the location of the Tamu operators showed a significant mean difference in intention to stay among the respondents. Meanwhile, the post hoc test showed that those in the West Coast of Sabah have a higher statistically significant mean difference than those in other areas such as Kudat, Interior and Tawau division of Sabah. There was no statistically significant mean difference in intention to stay in Tamu business regarding the respondent's age, gender, marital status, education, number of years in Tamu business, and purpose of doing business at Tamu. With a high mean score for intention to stay in Tamu business regardless of the respondent's profile and their responses for more than 60 % indicating Tamu as their primary source of income, the findings implied that most Tamu operators relied on Tamu as their primary business platform. Therefore, it might be difficult for them to leave their current business to venture into a new business that they are not familiar. Therefore, the relevant authorities should provide appropriate supports to these affected Tamu business operators.

**Keyword:** Covid-19, Intention to Stay, Tamu Operators, Sabah

### Introduction

Like any other nation, Malaysia's essential plans are to increase job opportunities and eradicate poverty. Therefore, Malaysia promoted entrepreneurship growth to achieve this strategy, as entrepreneurship development 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, which means "Meeting", serves as one of the platforms for entrepreneurial activity and growth for local people (Foo, 2018). Before supermarkets and shopping malls exist, Tamu has become an important place for local farmers, fishermen and hawkers to trade their products through barter trade, albeit on a small scale or currency system. Tamu is also a social meeting place where villagers exchange the latest information. Besides, the best way for foreigners to learn about locals' culture and lifestyle is to visit the local market or Tamu, which is fast becoming one of the tourist attractions. Tamu is popular in Kota Belud, Gaya Street Kota Kinabalu, Tuaran, Tamparuli and Putatan. The Gaya Street Tamu, Kota Kinabalu held on Sundays, commands the most foreign visitors due to its location is in the city.

However, 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). The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected business operations (Goodell, 2020; Sobieralski, 2020; Yang et al., 2020). It becomes worst when the government has implemented the movement control order (MCO). These controls include a ban on out-of-home, public gatherings, and temporary closure of business operations to reduce individual movement that causes transmission speed ( Bruin et al., 2020; Xiao & Torok, 2020). Implementing the MCO has significantly reduced the revenue of business operators such as tourism business operators due to low or absent tourism product demand (Bruin et al., 2020; Hanafiah et al., 2021).

Indeed, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the MCO implementation have greatly affected the small entrepreneurs, including Tamu operators, who struggle 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 in conjunction with government MCO. At the same time, the international ban has also affected some of the Tamu locations. For example, the weekly Tamu in Gaya Street has been badly affected as one of the state tourism attractions due to the significant drop of international visitors.

Studies on entrepreneurs' intentions have been overlooked by researchers (Mohd Hizam Hanafiah et al., 2016). The intention is defined as an individual's cognitive state, the most immediate and best predictor of 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 investigating entrepreneurs' intentions is Hanafiah et al. (2016), but the study is in franchising. Besides, many previous studies mainly concentrate on SMEs' entrepreneurial activities at the firm level

rather than an individual or sole proprietorship. There is currently a lack of study on intention in Tamu business operators, especially in Sabah. Thus, this study aims:

- to investigate the Sabah Tamu operator's intention to stay in their current business (Tamu business) due to the COVID-19 pandemic and some restrictions from the government.

The government agencies can use the study results to support the Tamu operators by introducing appropriate policies and support programs to maintain this traditional business platform.

### **Research Methodology**

A structured questionnaire was developed as the instrument to collect primary data of the study by undertaking purposive and snowballing sampling. This study applied the sampling methods because of the limited and unstructured nature of available data of the Tamu operators (Jauhar et al., 2016). The target population is the Tamu operators in Sabah.

For the questionnaire, the respondents were asked using a five-point Likert scale ranging from "1 strongly disagree" to "5 strongly agree" to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement to several statements relating to their intention to stay in the Tamu business in conjunction with the Covid-19 and MCO. Questions on intention to stay in the Tamu business are adapted from a study by Meyer (2018). The data collection of this research was conducted in two modes: by on-site survey and through online utilising Google forms. The questionnaires were distributed to Tamu operators at different Tamu sites in Sabah from December 2020 until April 2021. Snowballing sampling was applied in those areas where the on-site Tamu markets were not opened temporarily during the data collection due to the specific MCO period. A total of 125 questionnaires were successfully collected for the data analysis.

Two mean difference tests were then applied to investigate any mean difference amongst the groups. Firstly, a *t*-test was conducted to determine if the two groups were statistically different. Secondly, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to determine if three or more groups were statistically different.

### **Results**

#### ***Descriptive Analysis***

A total of 125 data from the distribution of a self-administered questionnaire to Tamu operators was obtained. The analysis of the data revealed that most of the respondents were from Tawau area (31.2%), female (63.3%), married (75.2%), has attended secondary school (53.6%), aged 36-44 years (53.6%) and in the Tamu business for five years and less (48.8%). In addition, 64.8 per cent of the respondents indicated that doing business at Tamu is their primary source of income.

#### ***Mean Difference Analysis***

Mean difference analysis was performed to compare the effect of respondents' profiles on intention to stay in the Tamu business. A one-way ANOVA revealed that there was a statistically significant difference in mean motivation to stay in Tamu business score between at least two groups ( $F(3, 121) = [5.299]$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Tukey's HSD test for multiple comparisons found that the mean value of motivation to stay in Tamu business was significantly different between West Coast and Tawau ( $p < 0.05$ , 95% C.I. =  $[0.0806, 0.6848]$ ), West Coast and Kudat

( $p < 0.05$ , 95% C.I. = [0.1119, 0.7478]), and West Coast and Interior ( $p < 0.05$ , 95% C.I. = [0.0535, 0.7113]). Meanwhile, there was no statistically significant difference in mean motivation to stay in Tamu business between Tawau and Kudat ( $p > 0.05$ ), Tawau and Interior ( $p > 0.05$ ), or Kudat and Interior ( $p > 0.05$ ).

Furthermore, *t*-test and one-way ANOVA tests for other respondents' profiles such as age, status, gender, year in business revealed no significant mean difference on mean scores for intention to stay in Tamu business.

**Table 1: Findings of Analysis**

Particular	Category	N	%	Mean	T-Test	One-Way							
<b>Overall</b>				4.4									
<b>Location</b>	Tawau	39	31.2	4.3		$F(3, 121)=5.299, p<=0.05$							
	West Coast	28	22.4	4.7		Tukey HSD							
	Kudat	31	24.8	4.2	-								
	Interior	27	21.6	4.3									
						<table border="1"> <tr> <td rowspan="3">West Coast</td> <td>Tawau</td> <td><math>P=0.007</math></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Kudat</td> <td><math>P=0.003</math></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Interior</td> <td><math>P=0.016</math></td> </tr> </table>	West Coast	Tawau	$P=0.007$	Kudat	$P=0.003$	Interior	$P=0.016$
West Coast	Tawau	$P=0.007$											
	Kudat	$P=0.003$											
	Interior	$P=0.016$											
<b>Gender</b>	Male	46	36.8	4.3	$t_{123} = -$								
	Female	79	63.2	4.4	$0.736,$								
					$p>0.05$								
<b>Age</b>	18-24 years	17	12.8	4.4		$F(4, 121)=1.829, p>0.05$							
	25-34 years	26	18.4	4.5									
	36-44 years	34	53.6	4.4	-								
	45-54 years	25	15.2	4.3									
	55 years and above	23	18.4	4.2									
<b>Marital Status</b>	Single	25	20.0	4.5		$F(2,122)=0.521, p>0.05$							
	Married	94	75.2	4.3	-								
	Others	6	4.8	4.4									
<b>Education</b>	No formal Education	16	12.8	4.2		$F(3,121)=0.838, p>0.05$							
	Primary	23	18.4	4.5	-								
	Secondary	67	53.6	4.3									
	Tertiary	19	15.2	4.4									
<b>Number of Year in Business</b>	5 years and less	61	48.8	4.4		$F(2,122)=1.56, p>0.05$							
	6-10 years	42	33.6	4.4	-								
	11 year and above	22	17.6	4.2									



<b>Purpose</b>	Primary	81	64.8	4.3	$t_{123} = -1.640,$ $p > 0.05$
	Income				
	Secondary	44	35.2	4.5	

### Discussion

On average, respondents strongly desire to remain in their current business irrespective of their gender, age, marital status, number of years involved in Tamu business, and purpose of doing business at Tamu. The findings indicated that most respondents relied on Tamu for their business activities regardless of their primary or secondary sources. It implied that Tamu emerges as one of the essential entrepreneurial platforms for entrepreneurs in Sabah nowadays.

The opportunity to have a higher income for the family due to higher demand may explain why the intention to stay in the Tamu business in the West Coast area showed a higher mean score than other areas in Sabah. The findings indicate that most respondents are married, implying that the Tamu operators need income to support their families. The West Coast area of Sabah is one of the areas with a higher population in Sabah, implying more demand for Tamu sites in that area. As a result, the business operators in Tamu may find it difficult to leave their existing business to pursue a new business platform to reach their existing customers. These findings support prior research (Hanafiah, 2012, 2014), indicating that boosting family income and flexibility to accommodate both business and family obligations are important factors for intention to stay in their current business.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings from this exploratory study have one main implication. Higher mean scores in intention to stay in Tamu business implied that the Tamu operators still have confidence that Tamu activities will resume through strict standard procedures. Tamu activities have existed since a long time ago and nowadays become one of the essential business platforms for the new generation. Therefore, the relevant authorities should give adequate financial and non-financial support to assist Tamu operators in maintaining their current business, which has been adversely affected by the COVID-19 and MCO implementation.

As most individual Tamu business operators were not registered officially, especially in the rural area, the relevant authorities should have more proactive to ensure those involved in the Tamu are not left behind to receive aid from the governments. Support from the government is to make sure that Tamu activity will continue as an entrepreneurial platform that has traditional and historical value. At the same time, Tamu has contributed to economic development in helping to reduce poverty among the local people through business activity. Like other research, this study also has its limitation. 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 because of 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.

### Competing Interest Statement

All authors have read and approved the manuscript and take full responsibility for its contents. The authors have declared that no competing interest exists.

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Appendix

**Appendix 1: Intention to Stay in Tamu Business Construct**

- 
- |          |                                   |
|----------|-----------------------------------|
| <b>1</b> | I like having a work life balance |
|----------|-----------------------------------|
- 
- |          |                            |
|----------|----------------------------|
| <b>2</b> | I prefer being my own boss |
|----------|----------------------------|
- 
- |          |   |
|----------|---|
| <b>3</b> | I desire more wealth and economic stability |
|----------|---|
- 
- |          |  |
|----------|--|
| <b>4</b> | I like being creative and using my talents |
|----------|--|
- 
- |          |                              |
|----------|------------------------------|
| <b>5</b> | I like pursuing challenge(s) |
|----------|------------------------------|
- 
- |          |   |
|----------|---|
| <b>6</b> | I like to grab new opportunity(ies) in the market |
|----------|---|
- 
- |          |  |
|----------|--|
| <b>7</b> | I want to prove that I own a successful business |
|----------|--|
- 
- |          |                                 |
|----------|---------------------------------|
| <b>8</b> | I want to contribute to society |
|----------|---------------------------------|
- 
- |          |  |
|----------|--|
| <b>9</b> | I want to give myself and my family more security by bettering my financial position |
|----------|--|
- 
- |           |   |
|-----------|---|
| <b>10</b> | I like the freedom of being able to adapt my own approach to work |
|-----------|---|
- 

Note: 1= "strongly disagree" to 5= "strongly agree"