

Self-Employment Strategies: Transforming Job Loss Into Entrepreneurial Success in The Post-Pandemic Gig Economy

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Abstract

The study investigates the broad impact of the pandemic on health, social dynamics, and the economy, particularly resulting in widespread job losses. It aims to understand how individuals, facing unemployment due to layoffs, downsizing, or health-related resignations, strive for economic independence post-pandemic. Utilizing a descriptive design with a qualitative approach, the research employs Maslow's theoretical framework to explain the journey towards independence. Findings reveal pervasive negative effects on the economy and individuals' lives. Notably, the pandemic instigates motivation, leading individuals to explore diverse job opportunities, and enhancing economic stability for survival. The study proposes a practical solution, advocating for self-employment in the form of "Gig Economy" entrepreneurship. This contributes scientifically and offers a guide for both researchers and the local community navigating post-pandemic challenges.

Keywords: Self-Employment Strategy, "Gig Economy" Entrepreneur, Post-Pandemic

Introduction

The occurrence of a pandemic is a profound phenomenon that leaves a lasting impact on human life, both in the short and long term. The bitter experiences and memories generated during such times become indelible marks on the collective consciousness of society (Thakur & Jain, 2020). The implications of a pandemic, as highlighted by Abdul Aziz et al (2020), extend beyond immediate health concerns, permeating into various aspects of life, creating challenges and trials for individuals. Health problems escalate during pandemics, leading to increased mortality rates. Governments worldwide have responded with extensive efforts to mitigate these challenges, implementing measures to control the spread of the virus and

address health crises (Abdul Aziz et al., 2020). The economic repercussions of a pandemic are significant, presenting numerous hurdles for individuals attempting to engage in economic activities. This situation, as emphasized by the World Health Organization (2020), has given rise to new and unprecedented challenges for local communities.

The post-pandemic era is marked by a new norm in the global landscape. Media coverage and current societal circumstances reflect the enduring effects of the pandemic on health, economy, and employment (World Health Organization, 2020). In the aftermath, societies grapple with the aftermath of health crises, economic downturns, and shifts in employment patterns. The resilience of communities is put to the test as they adapt to the challenges presented by the lingering impacts of the pandemic. The repercussions of a pandemic echo through various facets of human existence, leaving an enduring imprint on health, economy, and employment. The post-pandemic era introduces a new normal, prompting societies to navigate challenges, adapt to changes, and strive for resilience in the face of the unprecedented shifts brought about by the global health crisis.

The pandemic has brought forth a myriad of challenges, with significant repercussions for the workforce. Job losses, layoffs, and economic pressures have become prevalent, as noted by (Greyling et al., 2020). The resulting impact is not only financial but also poses a test of resilience for individuals who find themselves unemployed. The absence of a stable job adversely affects their ability to meet basic needs, from covering daily expenses to fulfilling financial commitments. The economic strain is compounded for married individuals, as highlighted in a Harian Metro press release on May 28, 2022, emphasizing that the pandemic's effects extend beyond health concerns to include economic pressures. The post-pandemic era witnesses individuals striving to improve their circumstances, engaging in various jobs to bolster economic resources and secure their survival (Susanti et al., 2021). Reflecting on the period since 2019, the aftermath of previous pandemics reveals a trail of job losses due to workforce reductions and business closures, causing economic and emotional upheaval (Sundarasan, 2020). Unemployment not only impacts financial stability but also takes a toll on emotional well-being, with some individuals experiencing prolonged job searches and facing the distressing prospect of mounting debts. The gravity of the situation is further underscored by instances of extreme consequences, such as suicidal thoughts and actions.

Despite the traumatic and negative effects of the pandemic, the passage of time and individual self-awareness have become catalysts for resilience and growth. The pandemic's impact serves as a turning point, compelling individuals to become proactive and dynamic in seeking opportunities to develop their talents, skills, and knowledge. This transformation becomes a crucial aspect of guaranteeing economic survival. In summary, the pandemic's aftermath has illuminated the strength and wisdom emerging from adversity. As individuals navigate the challenges of job loss and economic instability, they transform the negative impact into an opportunity for self-improvement and career development. This shift in perspective highlights the resilience of the human spirit and underscores the importance of proactive measures in overcoming the hurdles posed by a post-pandemic world. This area of study offers a valuable exploration of the human capacity for adaptation and growth, providing insights that can guide and inspire future generations in their pursuit of self-reliance and career development.

Research Objective

1. Investigate the repercussions of the pandemic, specifically focusing on how job loss has affected the lives of individuals.
2. Examine the various types of jobs undertaken as an independent strategy by individuals who have experienced job loss.

Literature Review

Extensive research conducted by scholars has predominantly associated the pandemic with adverse effects on local communities. Smyth et al (2020) emphasized that the pandemic has instigated a transformative shift in the fabric of human life, ushering in new norms that necessitate societal adaptation both presently and in the foreseeable future. However, this adjustment to the new norms is not universally embraced, and acclimatizing to this altered way of life proves to be a prolonged endeavour. Previous studies have also delved into the emotional toll inflicted upon communities by the pandemic, attributing these changes to the introduction of new life norms that impede daily activities. Ummul Maisarah et al (2022), and Zhang & Ma (2020) highlighted the emotional upheavals stemming from the constraints imposed by movement control measures, hindering individuals from performing their jobs. Furthermore, the entanglement of thoughts is exacerbated by the challenges encountered during the pandemic.

The repercussions of the pandemic extend beyond emotional changes, as evidenced by Khatijah Othman's study (2021). The local community faces various constraints and trials, manifested in limitations on daily activities due to concerns and adherence to pandemic Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). Additionally, Odriozola-González et al. (2020) observed that job losses resulting from the pandemic compel individuals to seek independence as a means to ensure their survival within the altered economic landscape. Despite the plethora of studies on the pandemic's effects, a notable gap exists in the literature regarding specific examinations of how individuals, particularly those who have lost their jobs, navigate the challenges and sustain themselves independently through various employment opportunities. Consequently, this study holds significant importance in contributing to the formation of a novel body of knowledge on the subject.

Maslow's Theory

In the framework of this study, Maslow's theory, as proposed by Maslow in 1943, serves as the theoretical underpinning. Maslow posits that individuals driven by intrinsic motivation can actualize their potential, ultimately leading to success. This motivational force stems from the consistent pursuit of search and exploration when confronted with challenges, presenting growth opportunities. The correlation between exploration, knowledge acquisition, and identifying pathways becomes evident more exploration begets more knowledge and a clearer direction.

This theory posits that individuals, through continuous exploration, can leverage all available opportunities to develop their inherent potential, fostering a sense of independence. The rationale behind selecting Maslow's theory for this study lies in its capacity to elucidate how the environmental impact, specifically the pandemic, shapes the spirit of self-reliance among individuals who have experienced job loss. This is akin to Maslow's hierarchy theory, particularly in the context of fulfilling basic needs such as sustenance. The study aims to

explore how individuals, influenced by the challenges posed by the pandemic, channel their motivations and self-reliance toward finding and creating career opportunities for themselves, echoing the principles outlined in Maslow's theory.

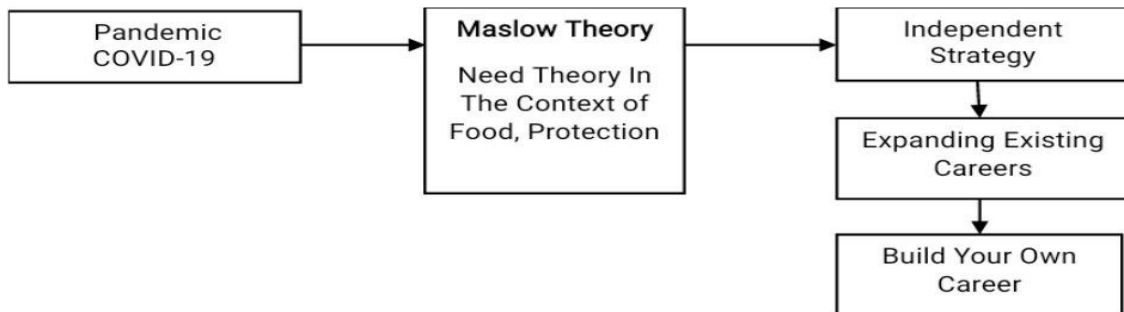


Figure 1. The Theoretical Framework of Independent Strategies Adapted From Maslow's Theory (Maslow, 1943).

Figure 1 illustrates the theoretical framework of the independent adaptation strategy based on Maslow's theory. The process begins with individuals actively engaging in efforts to discern the impact of the pandemic on their lives. Utilizing Maslow's theory, the study specifically focuses on three essential elements: food needs, protection and security. Firstly, in the realm of food needs, individuals strive to secure essential sustenance and daily necessities crucial for survival. The second element pertains to protection and security, given the negative health implications of the pandemic. This involves seeking insurance and healthcare measures to safeguard one's well-being, as well as ensuring a secure living environment, encompassing housing. Consequently, individuals work diligently to fulfil financial obligations such as rent payments, bills, and utilities.

Within the context of Maslow's theory, the manifestation of self-reliance emerges through two key strategies. Firstly, individuals proactively explore existing job opportunities adaptable to the pandemic era. Secondly, they embark on creating novel career paths tailored to the evolving circumstances of the pandemic. The scenario outlined in the theoretical framework gives rise to a diverse array of jobs adopted by individuals who have lost their employment. These jobs are integral components of their self-reliance strategy, enabling them to address their fundamental needs for food, shelter, and security. Therefore, the application of Maslow's theory as an analytical framework proves instrumental in comprehending and exploring the implementation of self-reliance strategies by individuals who have faced job loss, showcasing their ability to not only survive but also fulfil the essential requirements of their livelihoods.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design with a case study approach, chosen to thoroughly investigate and delve into how individuals who have faced job termination manage to sustain their livelihoods. The research procedure involves the use of interviews and participatory observation, selected as effective methods to directly gather information from informants, as outlined by (Creswell, 1998). To ensure a systematic and effective data collection process, the researchers assure informants of the confidentiality of all provided

information, fostering cooperation and candid responses. Conducted in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, the selection of this location is justified by its focus on individuals who have experienced job layoffs, engaging in both full-time and part-time employment. The area stands out as a hub where individuals actively seek part-time work to meet their life needs, particularly in comparison to other regions in Sabah. This prominence is attributed to Kota Kinabalu's status as a central location for diverse economic activities, driven by a high population density. Research analysis employs the method of research triangulation, integrating interview findings and observations. The manual analysis process is systematically organized to address the study's objectives, providing a comprehensive understanding of how individuals adapt and navigate the challenges of job loss in their pursuit of livelihood sustainability.

Analysis of Study Finding

The pandemic has unleashed a myriad of adverse effects on the lives of individuals who have experienced job loss, extending beyond the constraints on movement. The limitations imposed by the pandemic have not only curtailed daily activities but have also significantly diminished job opportunities for individuals, compelling some to face abrupt terminations. This scenario poses a substantial and challenging test for contemporary society, particularly for those who find themselves unemployed. The insights gathered from the interview study and observations shed light on the profound impact of the pandemic on individuals who have been dismissed from work.

Study Participants 1

Study participant 1 recounted facing numerous challenges during the pandemic, notably losing their job due to the company's downsizing measures. While some were fortunate to secure employment, those in subordinate positions, like Participant 1, found themselves compelled to acquiesce to the situation. However, the participant expressed the formidable difficulty of securing new employment amidst the pandemic's challenges. The findings suggest that, despite facing adversity, participant 1 has not yet formulated a successful strategy for securing alternative employment, profoundly affecting their daily life.

Study Participants 1

Facing The second study participant vividly expressed the profound challenges and stress experienced during the pandemic, emphasizing the immense burden on individuals, particularly those who lost their jobs. The participant lamented the daunting reality of financial strain, questioning how one could manage living expenses without stable employment. The financial struggles were exacerbated by the participant's inability to afford rent and other essential costs. The participant's friend, facing similar predicaments, resorted to returning to their village, highlighting a sense of feeling trapped and uncertain about survival in the city. The loss of employment not only disrupted financial stability but also rendered daily expenses, house rent, and bills unmanageable for the second study participant, exemplifying the severe repercussions of job loss during the pandemic.

Bad Experience

Experiencing a pandemic is deeply impactful, as it instils fear in individuals not only due to the health risks associated with potentially severe illnesses or even death but also because of its disruptive effects on the workforce. This negative experience induces a pervasive fear that deters individuals from venturing out to work, driven by concerns about the risk of contracting

COVID-19 and the potential threat it poses to their lives. The emotional toll of these adverse experiences often leads to hallucinations and disturbances, further exacerbating the psychological impact on individuals.

Study Participants 4

The shared narratives from friends echo similar distressing experiences, creating a widespread sense of panic. The constant reports of increasing COVID-19 cases and the ubiquitous presence of ambulances transporting patients intensify the prevailing fear. The heightened anxiety stems from the grim reality that some individuals, like those known to the speaker, have succumbed to the virus, contributing to an atmosphere of profound fear and sorrow. The pervasive impact of witnessing not only personal struggles but also the broader community grappling with the harsh consequences of the pandemic serves to deepen the overall sense of unease and apprehension.

Study Participants 6

Undoubtedly, the pandemic has universally brought forth challenging experiences, casting a shadow over the collective well-being. Contemplating the current global state undoubtedly stirs unease within our souls, as the shared impact on individuals is profound and unsettling. The sentiments of the fourth and sixth study participants, as revealed in the interviews, align with this collective sentiment. The pandemic's effects have not only imposed health-related pressures but have also induced emotional upheavals, creating a daily barrage of distractions that hinder their ability to find peace. This shared narrative underscores the pervasive and enduring disruptions that the pandemic has imposed on individuals, affecting both their physical and emotional well-being.

The Mind is Stuck

The study's findings underscore the profound impact of the pandemic, immobilizing individuals' minds as they grapple with the dual challenge of addressing both health and financial concerns. For those who have been laid off, the situation exacerbates, plunging them into severe financial difficulties. Traditionally reliant on their jobs for survival, the absence of employment opportunities leaves them in a state of deadlock, struggling to secure new employment and navigate the financial challenges that ensue. The study paints a stark picture of the multifaceted hardships individuals face, emphasizing the intricate interplay between health and financial crises triggered by the ongoing pandemic.

Study Participants 3

Upon first hearing about the emergence of COVID-19, a wave of panic and a myriad of emotions inundated individuals. The uncertainty surrounding the situation prompted profound contemplation about how to navigate life amid ongoing challenges. Study participant 3 echoed these sentiments, expressing the perpetual stagnation of their thoughts as they grapple with finding ways and solutions to address the myriad problems they encounter, particularly in the realm of employment. The pandemic's restrictive circumstances, coupled with the imposition of new norms that limit movement, contribute to the formidable difficulties in sustaining work and adapting to the evolving conditions. This shared sentiment sheds light on the persistent mental strain individuals experience in attempting to navigate work-related challenges within the context of the ongoing pandemic.

Study Participants 1

The contemplation of the repercussions of not working during the pandemic leads individuals, like study participant 1, to confront the overwhelming burden of various commitments. These commitments, encompassing car instalments, bill payments, and bank debts, impose a significant strain on their lives. The decision to leave employment intensifies the emotional toll, creating a heavy heart burdened with the weight of these undisclosed challenges. Participant 1's statement encapsulates the confusion and perpetual contemplation about how to navigate life under such circumstances. Furthermore, the struggle to secure part-time employment, exemplified by individuals seeking positions like restaurant waiters, becomes increasingly challenging due to workforce reductions during the pandemic. For those responsible for numerous familial obligations, such as fathers, the inability to secure employment heightens the pressure. Consequently, these individuals resort to utilizing their savings to cover essential needs like food, rent, car instalments, and various commitments. The depletion of savings coupled with the absence of income perpetuates the cycle of stress, as individuals grapple daily with the daunting financial challenges exacerbated by the ongoing pandemic.

The Problem of Unstable Emotional Changes

The majority of informants unanimously expressed enduring emotional instability throughout the prolonged duration of the pandemic. Faced with this persistent challenge, they exert significant effort to seek solutions that can provide them with strength and a sense of peace. Notably, several informants resort to prayer and reflection, invoking a source of inner strength to navigate what they perceive as challenging days. This coping mechanism serves as a means for individuals to find solace and resilience amid the uncertainties and emotional upheavals brought about by the enduring impact of the pandemic.

Study Participants 2

The revelation of a pandemic induces emotional instability in individuals, creating a shared experience among friends who exchange stories and collectively grapple with the challenges that unfold. The overwhelming uncertainty regarding work and the multitude of obstacles encountered lead to a mental state characterized by pressure and a dearth of clear thoughts. In the quest for peace, various coping mechanisms are attempted, including prayers and dhikr (remembrance of God). While these practices induce a positive change in emotions, the mental landscape remains marked by a blend of cleverness, confusion, and a persistent feeling of being stuck. This synthesis encapsulates the intricate and multifaceted nature of individuals' emotional responses and coping strategies amid the complex circumstances brought about by the pandemic.

Study Participants 4

Hearing pervasive discussions about the COVID-19 problem amplifies the sense of depression and apprehension among individuals, fostering a prevailing fear about the uncertainty of the situation. The fear intensifies upon learning about deaths, especially when such incidents occur close to one's residence. This fear extends to the workplace, where the thought of going to work becomes a source of anxiety, as individuals grapple with the potential repercussions on their families. The emotional toll is evident in the unstable emotional states experienced by study participants 2 and 4. The pandemic engenders a spectrum of emotions, including fear, worry, and anxiety, all of which are deeply influenced by the prevailing circumstances.

The participants express a mental standstill, unable to devise solutions in the face of the pandemic's challenges, emphasizing the profound impact on their emotional well-being and the mental struggle to navigate this unprecedented situation.

The types of jobs that are done as a self-sustaining strategy to continue for individuals who have lost their jobs.

Self-reliance Strategy (survival of those who lost their jobs during the pandemic)

In both pandemic and post-pandemic scenarios, individuals who have faced job loss proactively seek solutions to the challenges they encounter, employing various strategies to secure financial resources for their livelihoods. The adversity of the pandemic prompts individuals to engage in intelligent thinking and take actions aimed at bringing positive changes to their lives. This adaptive mindset reflects their ability to navigate the evolving conditions surrounding them. The manifestation of positive changes leads to independent actions, fostering a spirit of self-reliance crucial for survival, especially among those who are married.

Despite the negative impact of job loss during the pandemic, individuals harness the experience to drive positive changes, leveraging their existing skills and developing new ideas to explore employment opportunities. In the contemporary job landscape, characterized by challenges and a scarcity of opportunities, individuals recognize the necessity of creativity and resourcefulness to secure work and financial stability. Through empirical research findings, it becomes evident that individuals who have lost their jobs deploy various types of employment as part of their self-reliance strategy, showcasing resilience, adaptability, and a proactive approach to overcoming the hurdles posed by the pandemic-induced job loss.

Working in the Online Services Sector

Despite experiencing job loss due to factors like layoffs and workforce reductions, interview findings reveal a remarkable sense of optimism among informants. Determined to secure financial resources for their daily lives, individuals remain resilient and proactive in finding alternative means of employment. Notably, some informants express a preference for working as food couriers, affiliating with platforms like Grab, Food Panda, or Runner. This choice reflects their adaptability and resourcefulness, as they navigate the challenges of the job market by embracing opportunities in the food delivery sector. The decision to engage in food courier services underscores their commitment to finding practical solutions and generating income in the face of job uncertainties.

Study Participants 4

After enduring the prolonged challenges of the pandemic, a persistent state of stress has become a daily burden. Faced with this sustained stress, there emerges a resolve to seek a way out of the ongoing difficulties. The individual acknowledges the untenable nature of the current situation and harbours a constant thought that a solution must be found. In response to this determination, proactive efforts are made to explore various sources of employment and income, signalling a commitment to improving the circumstances and finding a way forward despite the persisting challenges brought about by the pandemic.

Study Participants 6

The dynamics of online commerce during the pandemic have offered a silver lining, with increased smartphone usage becoming a catalyst for heightened activity in the online marketplace. Individuals actively seeking essential items such as food and medicine have presented a prime opportunity for online merchants to advertise their services. In response to the evolving circumstances, study participants 4 and 6 reveal a shift in mindset over the course of the prolonged pandemic. Faced with job loss, these individuals recognized the need for smart thinking and seized the opportunity to build their own careers, particularly by engaging in e-hailing services such as Grab and Maxim.

For those residing in urban areas like Kota Kinabalu, the demand for e-hailing services has proven to be a lucrative source of income. Study participants who transitioned into e-hailing after losing their traditional jobs reported positive financial outcomes. This success is attributed to the high demand for such services within urban communities. Conversely, some informants have migrated from areas like Tawau, Semporna, Kota Marudu, Pitas, and Kudat to Kota Kinabalu, driven by the prospect of better livelihoods. The strategic move to an area with heightened demand for services aligns with the adaptability demonstrated by individuals seeking opportunities in the post-pandemic landscape.

Work in your own Business Sector

Several informants took the initiative to embark on entrepreneurship during the pandemic, initiating small businesses and leveraging online platforms for sales. A noteworthy approach involved cash-on-delivery (COD) services, allowing customers to pay in cash upon delivery. This entrepreneurial endeavor marked a departure from their previous experiences, primarily in the private sector. Despite the unfamiliar territory, these ventures proved fruitful for many informants, generating a substantial and consistent income daily. This adaptive shift in career strategies highlights the resilience and creativity of individuals as they navigate the challenges of the post-pandemic era.

Study Participants 2

The shift from contemplating employment within a city setting to considering solo endeavours emerged when job loss struck during the pandemic. This turning point sparked a reevaluation, prompting thoughts about the viability of independent work, particularly witnessing the success of individuals who ventured into their enterprises. Armed with a vehicle and a modest amount of knowledge and experience, the decision was made to follow suit and establish a Cash on Delivery (COD) service. Networking with friends who could provide guidance and opportunities further facilitated this transition. Engaging in COD services extended beyond conventional deliveries, encompassing a variety of items such as kitchen supplies, seafood, and more. The adaptability demonstrated in embracing diverse COD assignments showcases a resourceful approach to finding new opportunities, ultimately shaping a self-reliant career path during a challenging period.

Study Participants 5

The pandemic era has provided individuals with opportunities to promote their services and implement strategies effectively. One prominent method involves proactive engagement in online groups, initiating continuous advertisements as an early promotional tactic. Study Participant 2 exemplifies the embodiment of an independent and forward-looking approach

by leveraging personal advantages and abilities. Utilizing car facilities and an extensive network of contacts, they ventured into the Cash on Delivery (COD) business model. This approach streamlined various transactions, including purchasing food items, settling bills, and delivering goods. Study participant 5 echoes the significance of digital platforms, emphasizing the role of WhatsApp (Wasap) in facilitating online business, underscoring its contribution to buying, selling, and overall online work.

Within the seafood industry, participants engage in a multi-faceted marketing strategy. Initially, they advertise on WhatsApp to garner orders, allowing for efficient order fulfilment upon seafood supply arrival. The second method involves direct advertising on WhatsApp and Telegram groups, complemented by physical sales efforts through residential visits, offering a diversified approach to reach potential buyers. Beyond seafood, participants also venture into the food sector, marketing items such as burgers, cakes, and rice with side dishes. Embracing the COD food delivery service, they aim to simplify the purchasing process for customers and streamline sales transactions. This multifaceted business approach demonstrates adaptability, resourcefulness, and the exploitation of various channels to thrive in the post-pandemic business landscape.

Work in Business Digitally

Transitioning from the pandemic to the post-pandemic period, some informants have found success in the digital realm. Notably, they have effectively capitalized on opportunities within the Shopee platform, engaging in a business model where they earn commissions by assisting companies in marketing their products. This digital venture reflects a proactive response to evolving economic landscapes, showcasing the adaptability of individuals who have harnessed online platforms to carve out lucrative opportunities in the post-pandemic era.

Study Participants 2

Throughout the pandemic, the predominant focus for many individuals shifted to online business endeavours, recognizing the need for creativity in marketing strategies. While numerous attempts were made, success in this digital landscape was not universal, highlighting the challenges inherent in this approach. Study participant 2 underscores the importance of creativity, confidence, motivation, and persistent efforts in the realm of online business. Drawing from personal experience, the informant acknowledges encountering failures before ultimately achieving success. It is noted that the varying degrees of success among peers may stem from factors such as differing levels of interest, motivation, or challenges in securing clients. This collective experience emphasizes the dynamic and competitive nature of the digital business sphere.

Study Participants 4

The emergence of online businesses became a viable option for individuals during the pandemic, primarily as a response to limited job opportunities. The necessity of adapting to the circumstances prompted exploration into online ventures. The initial experience involved joining as a dropship and engaging in various sales avenues. While the adjustment period required getting used to the nuances of online business, the intention to persist until success was evident. Study participants involved in dropshipping operated as agents for diverse items, ranging from clothing to perfumes and various other products. Despite encountering initial challenges due to a lack of experience, their passion and relentless efforts propelled them

toward success in managing this business. Dropshipping, viewed as a means to generate income, necessitated diligent efforts in acquiring a customer base that would qualify them for commissions. The narrative emphasizes the resilience and adaptability of individuals who ventured into the online business sphere to secure financial stability amid challenging circumstances.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study findings highlight the multifaceted impact of the pandemic on individuals' lives, particularly those who experienced job loss. Despite the undeniable negative consequences of the pandemic, a notable positive outcome has been the cultivation of self-reliance. This newfound self-reliance has spurred individuals to seek innovative solutions, resulting in the creation of various types of jobs. Motivated by an intrinsic drive to progress, individuals have leveraged their environment to establish careers that contribute to their survival. The study emphasizes that the adversity of losing a job during the pandemic has not hindered individuals from persistently seeking and sustaining employment in the post-pandemic era.

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