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The Sustainable Factors of the East *Priangan* Micro and Small Entrepreneurs during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

In Indonesia, the number of micro and small businesses is dominant; therefore, their economic defense against uncertainty becomes vital, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. By utilizing the explorative approach, this study wants to know the effect of this pandemic on the ability of micro and small businesses in East *Priangan* to sustain and detect their internal and external sustainability factors during this pandemic. Furthermore, to accomplish these purposes, this study uses interviews to get the data based on the viewpoint of the eight businesspersons in one city: Tasikmalaya, and two regencies: Pangandaran and Ciamis. Based on the result, this study concludes that a heavily damaging effect exists in the business related to tourist attractions (a restaurant in Pangandaran), supplier of materials to restaurants (a tempeh producer in Ciamis), and crowding creation (the seller of various snacks and a wedding organizer in Ciamis). Meanwhile, the middle-damaging impact happens in the coffee shop in Tasikmalaya, the hawker of round-shaped snacks with a chewy texture, and the food staller of hollow tofu with a sauce made of salt, onion, and brown sugar in Ciamis but a street vegetable hawker in Ciamis experiences low-damaging influence. After being asked about internal and external sustainable factors fronting this pandemic, they declare that having money left and using Instagram and WhatsApp to receive consumer orders become their internal sustainable factors. Meanwhile, receiving government aid is an external factor for business survival during the pandemic.

Keywords: East *Priangan*, Micro and Small Business, Qualitative Study, Sustainable Factors, Covid-19 Pandemic

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic in Wuhan, China, at the end of 2019 harmfully caused human health (Miyah et al., 2022). This coronavirus quickly infected people through droplets and transmitted from one to more spacious areas, even across the borders of countries. These infected ones always experienced coughing and sneezing as their symptoms; as the worst effect, this virus could murder them. To prevent this virus transmission, World Health Organization requires everyone to wash their hands and keep their distance (Morawska & Cao, 2020).

Indonesia became one of the coronavirus-transmitted countries since its first official case was announced on March 2, 2019 (Sabiila, 2022). This pandemic destroyed the yearly economic growth in Indonesia, from 5.02% in 2019 to -2.07% in 2020, as displayed in the first figure based on the Indonesian Central Agency on Statistics data. Before the pandemic: 2014-2018, this growth rate was steady, around 5%. The decline in this growth directly demonstrates its harmful effect on business in Indonesia. According to Kustiyono et al. (2022), the affected companies are from the automotive, steel electrical equipment, textile, handicrafts, heavy equipment, and tourism industries.

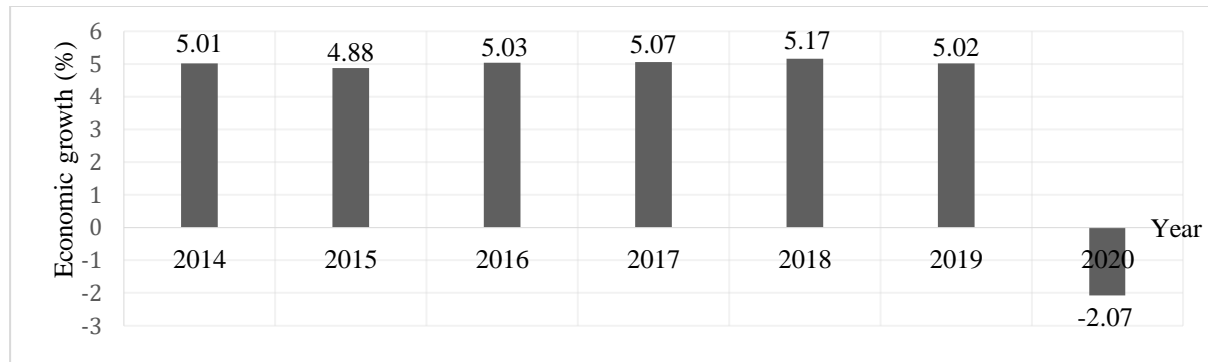


Figure 1: The economic growth rate from 2014 to 2020

Besides attacking big industries in Indonesia (Amri, 2020), the COVID-19 pandemic harmfully affects micro firms (Amri, 2020), small and medium companies (Amri, 2020; Lutfi et al., 2020; Setyoko & Kurniasih, 2022). Equally, Prof. Dr. Rully Indrawan, the secretary of the Ministry for Cooperatives and SMEs, explained that during the Covid-19 pandemic, the elevating number of businesspersons at MSM company with decreasing market demand occurred by 70% (Rachmawati, 2020). Also, this statement is supported by Panels A and B in Table 1 about the diminishing workforce absorption between 2019 and 2020. At the micro level, the workforce decreased from 96.89% in 2019 to 88.89% in 2020. At the minor level, it cut from 5.23% in 2019 to 4.77% in 2020. The diminishing status of this absorption also happened for the middle one, from 3.34% to 3.16%, and for the large one, from 3.36% to 3.18%.

Table 1: The comparison of business scale features before and during the first yearly Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia

Panel A. Situation before the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019				
Business scale	Available firms		Workforce absorption	
	Total (unit)	%	Total (people)	%
Micro	64,601,352	98.67	109,842,384	96.89
Small	798,679	1.22	5,930,317	5.23
Middle	65,465	0.10	3,790,142	3.34
Large	5,637	0.01	3,805,829	3.36
Panel B. Situation during the first year of COVID-19 in 2020				
Business scale	Available firms		Workforce absorption	
	Total (unit)	%	Total (people)	%
Micro	65,761,446	98.68	111,841,233	88.89
Small	808,679	1.21	600,6322	4.77
Middle	66,345	0.10	397,0434	3.16
Large	5,724	0.00	399,6654	3.18

West Java province has the largest Indonesian micro, small, and medium companies (Putri, 2023). Furthermore, to get more focused on the efforts for the companies to sustain during the Covid-19 pandemic, this study utilizes the micro and small firms in East *Priangan* in West Java. Therefore, this study aims to explore how much effect the Covid-19 pandemic has on micro and small businesses based on the perception of the businesspersons. Additionally, this research wants to recognize the internal and external factors for their business to survive during this pandemic.

2. Research Method

2.1. Basic research framework

This study utilizes the qualitative approach. According to Schindler (2022), this approach uses the interpretive and exploration technique to describe the phenomena. The description refers to the actors, what they do, and when and where their event happens. Therefore, based on Sugiyono (2019), the researchers must have a close and virtuous relationship with the actors to collect the information. In this research context, the actors are the micro and small businesspersons in East *Priangan*. Administratively, East *Priangan* is located in the southeast part of West Java, covering three regencies: Ciamis, Pangandaran, Tasikmalaya, and two cities: Banjar and Tasikmalaya.

2.2. Population and sampling technique

The population is the businesspeople in micro and small enterprises in the East *Priangan* areas. This study employs theoretical sampling as one of the non-probability sampling techniques because of the qualitative approach, as Neuman (2019) mentions. According to Neuman (2019), this sampling technique enables the researcher to choose some people based on the relevant situation as the sample.

2.3. Data collection method

The researchers interview businesspeople at their locations to build a social perspective, especially when social distance is applied. According to Bougie and Sekaran (2020), the interview is a focused conversation between two persons or more structurally and non-structurally. This study selects the structural one and delivers two structured questions: (1) What were the unique experiences during the restriction on community activities based on emergency and four-level status? After knowing the experiences, this study classifies the damaging effect of Covid-19 on their business into heavy, middle, and low. (2) What were your internal and external capabilities to sustain during these situations?

2.4. Method to analyze the data

This study uses the interview results to classify the damaging-effect Covid-19 pandemic on business. Based on these results, the heavy and middle status is given to the areas with complete closure and a time limitation for consumers to visit to buy goods, respectively. The low level is given to the areas with several buyers existing to purchase the products; therefore, the businesspersons still have steady revenue from sales. Additionally, their answer becomes the basis for this research to detect their internal capability to sustain and received government support during the pandemic.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. The research duration

The research was conducted during the second wave of the Covid-19 attack around June 21, 2021, in East *Priangan* and continued until August 2021. In this circumstance, the government used different terms to define the status of the Covid-19 pandemic based on the area. According to Detik News, from July 3 to 25, 2021, restrictions on emergency community activities (RECA) for Java and Bali became this status. Although that duration is not yet ended, the government changed its terminology to become the fourth and third-level imposition of restrictions on community activities (IRCA) on July 20 and applied it from July 21 to 25, 2021 (Sabiila, 2022).

3.2. The identity of the informants

The data collection was executed during the second wave of the Covid-19 attack around June 21, 2021, and continued until August 2021. It only obtained eight participants from three locations: Ciamis and Pangandaran regencies and Tasikmalaya city. However, the people from the Tasikmalaya Regency and Banjar City could not

be reached. Furthermore, the information from 8 participants can be seen in the second table. Based on this table, they sold round-shaped snacks with a chewy texture, vegetables, other snacks, and hollow tofu with a sauce made of salt, onion, and brown sugar. Besides, they opened the business of a coffee shop, eatery, salon, and wedding organizer.

Table 2: The identity of the informants

No.	Name	The business	Domicile
1.	Mrs. Aan Nafisatulmiskiyah	The seller of various snacks	Regency of Ciamis
2.	Mrs. Entin	The owner of the salon and wedding organizer	Regency of Ciamis
3.	Mr. Dede Zulmi	The owner of the eatery	Regency of Pangandaran
4.	Mr. Asep Lutfi Suparman	The owner of the coffee shop	Tasikmalaya city
5.	Mr. Agus	The hawker of round-shaped snacks with a chewy texture	Regency of Ciamis
6.	Mrs. Sri	The food staller of hollow tofu with a sauce made of salt, onion, and brown sugar	Regency of Ciamis
7.	Mr. Haris	The producer of tempeh	Regency of Ciamis
8.	Mrs. Tiara Eka Putri	The street vegetable hawker	Regency of Ciamis

3.3. The interview result on the effect of the covid-19 pandemic on micro and small business

During the Covid-19 pandemic, micro and small businesspersons in Ciamis and Pangandaran regencies and Tasikmalaya city had a unique experience, as reflected by the following interview results. As the seller of various snacks in the canteen in the public elementary school of Rajadesa1 in Ciamis, Mrs. Aan Nafisatulmiskiyah, based on the interview on July 8 and August 23, 2021, informed that the long-distance learning of the students caused her cannot optimally sell snacks anymore. Although the teachers on duty bought her goods, the revenues could not cover the operating expenses. Hence, she decided to sell the goods in front of her house. By doing it, the income from sales existed because many children around her house purchased it. Based on this description, this study classifies the effect of Covid-19 on her business as heavy.

As the salon owner and wedding organizer in Ciamis, Mrs. Entin stated in her interview on July 8, 2021, that the schedule of wedding parties had been dismissed since the restrictions on emergency community activities. The bride and groom can no longer hold their party because local officials prohibit them. Therefore, Mrs. Entin only came to make up for them for the wedding ceremony. In another case, she has ever been warned because of fulfilling the customers and insisted on holding the wedding reception. Based on this depiction, this study classifies the heavily damaging effect of Covid-19 on her business.

Furthermore, Mr. Dede Zulmi, one of the eatery owners around the tourist attraction in Citumang, Pangandaran, admitted in his interview on July 10, 2021: During the restrictions on emergency community activities, his business must be closed. Therefore, the visitation of tourists was forbidden. Similarly, based on the August 18, 2021 interview, he showed no change in his effort. Based on this circumstance, this study classifies the highly damaging effect of Covid-19 on his business.

Moreover, Mr. Asep Lutfi Suparman, the owner of the coffee shop in the city of Tasikmalaya, declared that he broke the regulation because of opening his coffee shop above eight p.m. Consequently, he had two alternatives given by the judge on July 13, 2021: paying the fine of IDR5,000,000 or getting jailed for three days. Finally, he chose to get imprisoned, and after completing a three-day punishment, he was released, as Detik News informed (Ramadhan, 2021). Thus, this study categorizes it as the middle damaging effect of Covid-19 on his business.

Based on the interview with Mr. Agus, the hawker of round-shaped snacks with a chewy texture in the economic area in Ciamis, on July 15, 2021, he could not sell them optimally because of the time limitation and few buying

customers because of the restrictions on emergency community activities. Equally, Mrs. Sri, the food staller in the economic center in Ciamis, in her interview on July 15, 2021, declared that she must close their business earlier. Hence, this study classifies the middle damaging effect of Covid-19 on their business.

When interviewing Mr. Haris, the tempeh producer, on July 19, 2021, he declared that during the restrictions on emergency community activities, the restaurants becoming his customer were closed, and their tempeh orders were canceled; thus, he counted on the demand from individual consumer around his location. He was also stressed because of the increase in the price of soybean. Therefore, this study categorizes it as the highly damaging effect of Covid-19 on his business. Unlike him, Mrs. Tiara Eka Putri, through the first interview on July 19, 2021, declared that she could increase her sales by 100% and 200% from her marketed vegetables during the RECA in Ciamis. On August 4, 2021, she said she only could attain an increase of 20% because of the third-level imposition of restrictions on community activities. On August 30, 2021, she noticed that her sales were average. Considering this evidence, this study categorizes it as the little damaging effect of Covid-19 on her business.

3.4. The interview result of sustainable factors supporting the micro and small entrepreneurs

Besides asking about their experience, this study interviews micro and small entrepreneurs about the factors to sustain during the Covid-19 pandemic, especially in restrictions on community activities. Based on the interview result, they mentioned internal and external factors. Internally, they were helped by the little money left to survive, which happened in all informants in this study. Besides, the entrepreneurs, such as Mr. Agus (the hawker of round-shaped snacks with a chewy texture), Mrs. Sri (the food staller of hollow tofu with a sauce made of salt, onion, and brown sugar), Mr. Haris (the producer of tempeh) and Mrs. Tiara Eka Putri (the street vegetable hawker) felt the benefits of online messaging platform such as WhatsApp to receive orders from their local customers. Besides WhatsApp, Mrs. Entin utilized Instagram to promote her salon and wedding organizer and received consumer orders.

Based on the interview result, they gave mutually exclusive government aid during the Covid-19 pandemic, such as productive assistance for micro businesses (PAMB), the allowance for tourism businesspersons (ATB), and direct rural cash assistance (DRCA). In this study context, the receiver of PAMB was Mrs. Aan Nafisatulmiskiyya, Mrs. Sri, Mr. Haris, and Mrs. Tiara Eka Putri. For ATB, its receiver was Mr. Dede Zulmi. Lastly, Mr. Agus was the recipient of the DRCA. Unfortunately, for Mrs. Entin and Mr. Asep Lutfi Suparman, the information does not exist.

3.5. Discussion

Nationally, Indonesian micro, small, and medium businesses can survive during the pandemic, as shown by their increasing units, as Table 3 demonstrated. In this table, the micro-scaled businesses elevated from 64,601,352 units in 2019 to 65,761,466 units in 2020; therefore, the change was 1.80%. Similarly, their number upsurged from 798,679 to 808,679 units between 2019 and 2020 for small firms and from 65,465 units to 66,345 units between 2019 and 2020 for middle-scale enterprises. Hence, their change was 1.25% and 1.34%, respectively. Based on this circumstance, the impact of this pandemic in Indonesia is different from the prediction of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development about active business bankruptcy in some countries after this pandemic: 12% in Germany, 21% in France, 24% in Japan, 37% in the United Kingdom, 43% in the United States, 44% in Brazil and 50% in Turkey (OECD, 2020).

Table 3: The comparison of the number of micro, small, and middle enterprises before and during the first yearly Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia

Business scale	Before the pandemic (2019)	During the first yearly pandemic (2020)	Change
Micro	64,601,352	65,761,446	1.80%
Small	798,679	808,679	1.25%
Middle	65,465	66,345	1.34%

Indeed, the fund becomes a problematic source for micro and small ventures to sustain. Therefore, government aid is needed to overcome this issue and to create their performance. This circumstance is confirmed by Zhang and Ayele (2022), declaring the more funding assistance from the government, the better the firm performance based on the perspective of 384 respondents covering leaders and employees in the micro and small companies in the Amhara Region, Ethiopia. Similarly, Alkatani et al. (2020), through their research on 267 businesspeople, confirm a positive association between government aid and the sustainable competitive performance of small and medium manufacturing enterprises in Islamabad and Rawalpindi, Pakistan. Using secondary data from small and medium enterprises in Korea between 2006 and 2011, Park et al. (2020) exhibit that loans from the government can support related firms to endure. Likewise, Feranita et al. (2019) confirm the positive relationship between government aid and business performance after investigating the 165 small and medium firms in Probolinggo City and the six regencies in East Java: Probolinggo, Lumajang, Jember, Bondowoso, Situbondo, and Banyuwangi.

Also, Instagram is a social media platform with a significant role in the wedding salon business, as Mrs. Entin has and utilizes. The application of Instagram to elevate business performance is helpful, especially during the Covid pandemic. It is also supported by a qualitative study by Parahiyanti and Prasasti (2021), locating that Instagram utilized by micro, small, and medium companies can engage customers during this pandemic. By applying the quantitative investigation on the Indonesian micro, small, and medium businesspersons utilizing social media, i.e., Facebook and Instagram, Syaifullah et al. (2021) demonstrate that these media can positively support their business performance during this pandemic. Equally, Akbar (2021) exhibits the positive impact of Instagram on the financial and non-financial performance of small and medium enterprises in Malaysia after investigating 352 employees. Besides, after studying 100 small and medium businesspersons in Celuk Village in Bali, Yasa et al. (2020) demonstrate a positive association between their business performance and usage of social media: Instagram, YouTube, and Line. By adopting social commerce belonging to 144 small and medium enterprises such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, according to the study by Lina and Suwarni (2022), the related owners can improve both financial and brand business performance.

4. Conclusion

Nationally, the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia requires people to keep their distance socially as one of prevention. Consequently, their activities are limited. In this study context, this situation influences micro and small businesses in East *Priangan*. Hence, this investigation aims to detect the damaging effect of this pandemic and know the internal and external factors for their business to continue. Based on the interview results from the related businesspersons between June and August 2021, this study reveals that the damaging impact of the Covid-19 pandemic can be heavy, medium, and low. The severe effect happens in the restaurant and its supplier, a snack seller in an elementary school, and a wedding organizer. The middle exists in the food stall business. Hawkers can have a medium and little damaging influence depending on the situation. The fund left, and online applications, such as WhatsApp and Instagram, became internal factors for their business to survive. Government aid is the external solution for their business during the pandemic. Based on these facts, this study recommends that the related actors should efficiently and effectively operate their business; therefore, the fund still exists. This action is needed to anticipate the possibility of social restriction required by the government in the future.

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