

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC CRISIS ON RURAL AGROPRENEURS AND BUSINESS CONTINUITY STRATEGY

Muhamad Asri Abdullah Kamar* and Mohamad Azal Fikry Ali

Faculty of Architecture, Planning and Surveying, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Perak, Malaysia

*Corresponding author: masri418@uitm.edu.my

Published online: 30 April 2025

To cite this article: Muhamad Asri Abdullah Kamar and Mohamad Azal Fikry Ali. 2025. The impact of COVID-19 pandemic crisis on rural agropreneurs and business continuity strategy. *Kajian Malaysia* 43(1): 185–200. <https://doi.org/10.21315/km2025.43.1.9>

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.21315/km2025.43.1.9>

ABSTRACT

Research on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis on rural agropreneurs, especially in developing countries, is still lacking. Rural agropreneurs are an important group because they contribute to the national economy, but they have been facing great challenges during the pandemic. The objectives of the current research are to explore the impact of the pandemic on rural agropreneurs and describe the business continuity strategy amid the crisis. This research was carried out at the Rural Community Centres (RCC) of Kg. Jelintoh, Gopeng, Perak, Malaysia. Being the most active RCC in conducting entrepreneurship programmes in the previous year, the researcher decided to choose this centre for the study. Despite their continuous efforts, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected many agropreneurs of the RCC. Hence, this exploration research utilised a qualitative approach, which involved an in-depth interview using a semi-structured interview format with nine rural agropreneurs. They were selected through a non-probability sampling technique, which was a purposive sampling from the list of agropreneurs. Data were analysed using a thematic analysis approach. The result shows that the impacts can be categorised into two main themes, namely business operation and business finance. Besides, two main themes for business continuity strategies were identified, namely marketing strategy and financial strategy. Findings from this study provide good input to relevant agencies in assisting the rural agropreneurs restoring their business.

Keywords: business continuity, COVID-19, crisis, impact, rural agropreneur

INTRODUCTION

World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic on 11th March 2020, when confirmed cases reached over 118,000 patients, with more than 4,000 deaths globally (WHO 2020). These figures drastically increased because the virus spread easily among humans. For instance, 243,572,402 people were infected by COVID-19, with 4,948,434 deaths all over the world on 26 October 2021 (WHO 2021). Malaysia had 2,442,224 confirmed cases, with 28,576 deaths on the same date (Ministry of Health Malaysia 2021).

The COVID-19 outbreak is impacting people all around the world, disrupting economic activities, state functions and livelihood options, and reshaping global dynamics (Giammarinaro 2020). COVID-19 has affected the Malaysian economy through three channels, which are decreasing export demand, decreasing domestic demand, and the impact of the implementation of the Movement Control Order (MCO) (Astro Awani 2020). In Malaysia, the MCO was implemented in phases and categories from 18 March 2020 until 10 October 2021. The variation of MCO implementation depended on the situation of COVID-19 cases nationwide. However, the MCO has been lifted since 11 October 2021.

Many researchers discovered the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on small-scale businesses in developed (Bartik et al. 2020) and developing countries (Fabeil, Pazim and Langkat 2020). Nevertheless, their studies focused on Micro, Small, and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs). To the best of our knowledge, research about the impact of the pandemic on rural agropreneurs (defined by Gajendrakumar and Kartheeswari (2018) as an entrepreneur who uses agriculture to build a business) is quite limited.

In the local context, rural refers to other than urban areas; it comprises all villages and small settlements with a population of less than 10,000, and it is characterised by agriculture and abundance of natural resources, low population density, low percentage of age-active population; its economic-based population comprises of agriculture, rural industry, and natural products/resources and it maintains the rural sociocultural activities including rural organisation, family institution, community, and cultural activities (PLANMalaysia 2017). Hence, a rural agropreneur can be best understood as an entrepreneur who uses agriculture-based activities to build a business in a rural area.

Rural agropreneurs are significant business groups due to their contribution to national food security, job creation, and so forth. Unfortunately, like many other sectors, they are currently facing several challenges during the pandemic. Most of

them have less money because their sales revenue dropped drastically. Concerned by this situation, the objectives of the current research are to explore the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis on rural agropreneurs and describe the business continuity strategies during the crisis adopted by them.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Crisis

Prior to further discussion about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on rural agropreneurs and business continuity strategy, it is crucial to briefly understand the concept of crisis. Initially, the concept of crisis includes definition, classification, and its stages. Crandall, Parnell and Spillan (2014) stated that a crisis is an event that has a low probability of occurring but, should it occur, it can have a vastly negative impact on the organisation. Moreover, Olteanu, Vieveg and Castillo (2015) suggested two main categories of crises, which are natural and human-induced. They said sub-categories of natural crisis consist of meteorological, hydrological, geophysical, climatological, and biological, while sub-categories of a human-induced crisis include intentional and accidental. Epidemic and infestation are examples of biological natural crises (Olteanu, Vieveg and Castillo 2015). Crandall, Parnell and Spillan (2014) posited that there are three stages of a crisis, which are pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis.

Obviously, it is understood that a crisis is a low-probability event, and its impact is ambiguous and has many classifications and stages. Unexpected events cause the planning for a crisis preparation to be troublesome. The COVID-19 pandemic is considered a crisis because it falls into health incidents. The simplest option to understand the stages of crisis is the three-stage framework. Hence, this research referred to crisis as three stages, which are pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis, because it is the most basic framework for all crisis stages. Today, most countries in the world, including Malaysia, are at stage two, which is having a crisis due to the fluctuation of daily COVID-19 cases (Jafri et al. 2020).

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic Crisis on Rural Agropreneur

There is a dearth of empirical research regarding the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on rural agropreneurs. However, several scholars have attempted to study those impacts on MSMEs, such as Bartik et al. (2020) as well as Nur Hazirah, Salina and Lai (2021). Although they did not focus directly on rural agropreneurs, the researchers believe that their studies have shed light on exploring the topic

further. Bartik et al. (2020) found the COVID-19 pandemic impact were mass layoffs and closures of small businesses in the United States of America (USA) had already occurred – just a few weeks into the crisis; many businesses were financially fragile; a majority of businesses planned to seek funding through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act.

Fabeil, Pazim, and Langgat (2020) found the impacts faced by rural agropreneurs include failure to operate the business as usual, loss of clients, dumping of agricultural produce due to the closure of several supporting sectors such as retail and transportation, decrease in daily sales revenue, and loss of income. Nur Hazirah, Salina and Lai (2021) discovered many micro-entrepreneurs were affected in terms of operation disruption and financial issues. The finding in operation disruption includes the closure of the business operation, shortage of logistic supply, inability to travel anywhere, travelling period getting longer, and delivery of products facing a delay. The financial issue includes paying for shop lot/rental kiosk and food truck loan, unexpected increase in production cost due to operational disruptions, lack of roll-up capital to continue the business and having to depend on other loans to cover several costs, and bankruptcy risk.

Ahmad Raffis, Suraiya and Mohd Abdullah (2020) discovered that the impacts of MCO on Small, Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are operational problems (operation disruption, supply chain disruption, foresight of future business direction) and financial problems (cash flow imbalance, access to stimulus packages, risk of bankruptcy). Based on all the above research, it is understood that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis on MSMEs is tremendous. If this issue is neglected, the aim of the Malaysian government to eradicate poverty in the rural area (Dasimah et al. 2018) and transform it into competitive economic focal points (Mohd Fadzil et al. 2021) cannot be achieved.

Firm Resources and Business Continuity Strategies during Crisis

Many previous scholars discussed firm resources in the context of a Resource-Based View (RBV), such as Barney (1991) or Resource-Based Theory (RBT) (Warnier, Weppe and Lecocq 2013). Firm resources are strengths that firms can use to conceive of and implement their strategies (Porter 1981). Firm resources, including all assets, capabilities, organisational processes, firm attributes, information, knowledge, etc., are controlled by the firm, which enables the firm to conceive of and implement strategies that improve its efficiency and effectiveness (Daft 2008). Hence, firm resources are diverse and vital in determining the survival of a business. Meanwhile, strategy is a focal organisational resource in determining firm decisions, capabilities, competitive advantages, and performance during crisis

periods (Mahani and Suraiya 2019). A firm is said to have a competitive advantage when it is implementing a value-creating strategy not simultaneously being implemented by any current or potential competitors (Barney 1991). Besides firm resources, strategy is vital in navigating the firm to survive and remain competitive in the business.

Previous studies have reported several business continuity strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. Fabeil, Pazim, and Langgat (2020) found micro-entrepreneurs employed multiple synchronous strategies to ensure continuous operation of their business during MCO, namely shortening the supply chain through centralised synchronous distributors, producing emerging products to meet current customers' needs (customers are looking for essential foods as well as cleaning and sanitary products); using digitalised marketing through mobile applications and social media, such as Facebook and WhatsApp; employing collect on delivery or cash on demand (COD) transaction for the sale of goods; receiving payment via bank transfer or e-wallet; operating the business from home. The synchronous distribution approach allows them to earn decent incomes during the crisis (Fabeil, Pazim and Langgat 2020).

Nur Hazirah, Salina and Lai (2021) discovered that the strategies used by micro-entrepreneurs could be themed as adapting to the new norm; these strategies were changing the business operation locations from physical shops to home-based and online platforms, diversifying the product, promoted and sold it through an online platform; some of the participants reported requesting an additional financial loan from Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia (AIM). Bartik et al. (2020) discovered that most small businesses in the USA planned to seek funding through the CARES Act. Unfortunately, credit facilities or funding from the government also have some shortfalls because of many anticipated problems with accessing the programme, such as bureaucratic hassles and difficulties establishing eligibility (Bartik et al. 2020). These examples show that the entrepreneurs took various strategies to safeguard business continuity. However, not all entrepreneurs are able to adopt this strategy due to constraints such as limited skill and small roll-up capital.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This descriptive research aims to obtain meaningful insights into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis on rural agropreneurs and business continuity strategies. The exploration study utilised a qualitative approach to collect the data. It involved an in-depth interview using semi-structured telephone interview calls. The telephone interviews were conducted from 11 September 2021 until

16th September 2021. This method was selected to gain in-depth insight from the respondents. Besides, the safest communication channel was using telephone interviews as the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak was still ongoing (Ahmad Rafli, Suraiya and Mohd Abdullah 2020).

The study area is the Rural Community Centre (RCC) of Kampung Jelintoh. RCC is a grassroots facility by the Ministry of Rural Development of Malaysia to assist the rural community in entrepreneurship. RCC of Kampung Jelintoh is located approximately three kilometres from Gopeng, a small town in Perak, Malaysia. It was selected because it was the most active RCC in the state of Perak in conducting entrepreneurship programmes in the previous year. Currently, there are 23 agropreneurs in the study area who are involved in various agropreneurship activities.

The respondents were selected through a non-probability sampling technique, specifically purposive sampling. The selection was made from the list of rural agropreneurs provided by Puan Siti Rohana Ismail, a representative from RCC of Kampung Jelintoh. A total of nine respondents were interviewed. It is believed that the number of respondents has reached saturation of nine and is considered enough without compromising the quality of the results obtained from this research. While the sample size in the qualitative research suggested by previous scholars such as Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) is 15 interviews, Walker (2012) believed in the data saturation concept, which is when sufficient information is achieved and available to replicate the study, a lower sample size of respondents is adequate. Hence, we believe that this study has met the data saturation requirement in terms of various agropreneurship activities, level of experience (between 3 to 10 years), both genders, and various academic qualifications of respondents. Table 1 shows the background of the nine respondents and their agropreneurship activities, such as nursery and sale of hydroponics equipment.

The interview protocol begins with the sending of a semi-structured questionnaire to the respondents through the WhatsApp message platform about half an hour prior to a telephone call. In so doing, the respondents will be more ready for the interview (Ahmad Rafli, Suraiya and Mohd Abdullah 2020). The interviews took about 25 to 30 minutes each and were audio-recorded with the respondents' permission. The interview recording was later transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis. The current research follows the content analysis procedure proposed by Austin and Sutton (2015), which involves coding, thematisation, summarising and interpretation of data to get meaningful findings.

Table 1: Background of respondents and agropreneurship

| Respondent | Academic qualification | Type of agropreneurship | Years of experience | Possess other job |
|-------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Informant 1 | Diploma | Hydroponics equipment | 3 | Yes |
| Informant 2 | PhD | Pre-mixed herbal rice | 4 | Yes |
| Informant 3 | SPM | Nursery | 3 | No |
| Informant 4 | Diploma | Soybean drinks | 5 | No |
| Informant 5 | Degree | Nursery | 5 | No |
| Informant 6 | Diploma | Fried pea crisp | 6 | Yes |
| Informant 7 | SRP | Frozen food - sour meat | 10 | No |
| Informant 8 | Degree | Food - pineapple spicy dish | 4 | No |
| Informant 9 | Diploma | Hydroponics equipment | 5 | Yes |

Note: SRP (Sijil Rendah Pelajaran); SPM (Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia)

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Based on the in-depth interview, two main themes were discovered for the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis on rural agropreneurs and business continuity strategies respectively. The themes for the impact are business operation and business finance. While the themes for business continuity strategies are marketing strategy and financial strategy (Table 2).

Table 2: Discovered themes from in-depth interview

| Research objectives | Main themes |
|---|--|
| To explore the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis on rural agropreneurs. | Business operation Business financial |
| To describe the business continuity strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis adopted by rural agropreneurs. | Marketing strategy Financial strategy |

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic Crisis on Rural Agropreneurs

Generally, the impacts of the crisis can be categorised into two main themes: business operation and business financial.

Business operation

The major impact of business operations was operation disruption. All respondents said they were facing operation disruption during the pandemic. The situation was believed to be related to the implementation of MCO. For instance, agropreneurs who were involved in hydroponic equipment cannot sell their products at the weekly market as usual since this activity was classified under the non-essential sector. An agropreneur who sold pre-mixed herbal rice said the orders from the customers, especially those from Klang Valley, plummeted drastically, and eventually, she lost many clients. Although some agropreneurs in the food processing sector (sour meat and pineapple black spicy) were allowed to operate, they said the business operation period was shorter, and it was difficult to get the raw material. Excerpts from the interview are listed as follows:

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, I cannot sell the product at the weekly market and the AgroFest organised by the Federal Agricultural Marketing Authority (FAMA) as usual. (Informant 1, 11 September 2021, 8:30 p.m.)

Order for my product from the customers, especially located in the Klang Valley, reduced drastically, and I lost many clients. (Informant 2, 12 September 2021, 8:20 a.m.)

Business operation period becomes shorter. (Informant 7, 15 September 2021, 9:00 a.m.)

I have difficulty in obtaining the raw material. (Informant 8, 15 September 2021, 10:00 a.m.)

The second impact of MCO was business closure. However, this study found that business closure was understood as a temporary measure until the pandemic crisis became more stable or the country would later move to endemic status. This measure involves the business of food and beverage processing (soybean drinks, fried pea crisps, sour meat). The products are not crucial for the customers. Hence, the demand for these products is given less priority as compared to other essential products such as rice, egg, sugar etc. Extracts from the interview are listed as follows:

I have to close the rented premise at MIEL Industrial Area, Kuala Kangsar and move the operation to home. (Informant 4, 12 September 2021, 9:40 a.m.)

I have to temporarily close my business since the order from the customers is very low. (Informant 6, 12 September 2021, 10:30 a.m.)

I have to close the premises which I used as my kitchen and move the business to home. (Informant 7, 15 September 2021, 9:00 a.m.)

The third impact was product defect. The current study found that the businesses that faced such issues were nurseries and fried pea crisps. Many small plants died due to less monitoring from the staff and the fried pea crisp was not long-lasting. Extracts from the interview are listed as follows:

My small plants perished due to less monitoring. It happened because my part-time staff cannot cross the district border and come to work. (Informant 5, 14 September 2021, 9:00 a.m.)

I have to take back my dozens of bottles of fried pea crisp from the agents and demolish them because the product was not lasting. (Informant 6, 12 September 2021, 10:30 a.m.)

The fourth impact of the MCO was product accumulation. This finding has a positive impact on agropreneurs, especially in the nursery sector. It was understood that the stock of small plants increased, and they were ready for sale. Although product sales decreased during the COVID-19 pandemic, the agropreneurs have much time to add up the quantity of new plants. Extracts from the interview are listed as follows:

The stock of small plants increased and ready for sale. (Informant 3, 12 September 2021, 9:00 a.m.)

The stock of product increased because I can add up my quantity of plantings during the pandemic. (Informant 5, 14 September 2021, 9:00 a.m.)

Business financial

The first impact of business finance was the cash flow problem. All respondents said they were facing this problem. Among the identified problems in the current study are the plummeting of the sale of products drastic income reduction, and lack of roll-up capital but business owners still having to pay for monthly rental of business premises. Furthermore, the finding shows that businesses such as fried pea crisp have recorded zero monthly income because the product was not an essential daily food. Hence, this business is categorised as a fragile sector. Extracts from the interview are listed as follows:

Most of my customers come from Klang Valley and Penang, but the pandemic has reduced the sale of hydroponic equipment and decreased my monthly income by almost half. (Informant 1, 11 September 2021, 8:30 p.m.)

My monthly sale of herbal plants, flowers and nursery equipment reduced from RM3,000.00 to RM700.00. (Informant 3, 12 September 2021, 9:00 a.m.)

My monthly sale of fried pea crisp becomes zero. (Informant 6, 12 September 2021, 10:30 a.m.)

Reduction in my monthly sale, lack of business roll-up capital, but I have to pay for the monthly rental of the business premise. (Informant 7, 15 September 2021, 9:00 a.m.)

The second financial impact was access to the stimulus package. Several agropreneurs did not receive any economic stimulus package from the government agencies. They were not eligible for the fund because some of them failed to renew the Companies Commission of Malaysia (CCM) permit or failed to register their business with CCM or other government agencies. It was due to the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly the MCO, that has prevented the agropreneurs from travelling to a certain location. However, they kept operating since some treated business as a hobby to earn a side income. Hence, they were not eligible for any economic stimulus package. Extracts from the interview are listed as follows:

I did not receive any economic stimulus package since I did not register yet with government agencies but ran the business as my hobby. (Informant 2, 12 September 2021, 8:20 a.m.)

I did not receive any economic stimulus package because my CCM permit has expired. (Informant 6, 12 September 2021, 10:30 a.m.)

The third financial impact was the increased price of raw materials. Some agropreneurs said they faced unexpected increases in the price of raw materials such as cooking oil, mixed flour, pineapple and anchovy. The situation occurred because of supply chain disruption due to MCO. Extracts from the interview are listed as follows:

Price of raw material such as cooking oil, mixed flour increased. (Informant 6, 12 September 2021, 10:30 a.m.)

Price of raw material like pineapple and anchovy increased. (Informant 8, 15 September 2021, 10:00 a.m.)

Business Continuity Strategies during the COVID-19 Pandemic Crisis

Two main themes for business continuity strategies were identified, namely marketing and financial strategies.

Marketing strategy

In terms of marketing strategy, all agropreneurs used digital marketing to sell their products. The agropreneurs utilised online platforms such as Lazada, Shopee and social media (WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok). Many of them obtained digital marketing skills through online classes before the COVID-19 outbreak. Thus, the pandemic has accelerated digital marketing usage. Extracts from the interview are listed as follows:

I totally use digital marketing through online platforms such as Lazada, Shopee. (Informant 1, 11 September 2021, 8:30 p.m.)

I use digital marketing through social media (such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok) and online platform (Shopee). (Informant 3, 12 September 2021, 9:00 a.m.)

The second marketing strategy that was employed by many agropreneurs was to diversify the products. For instance, agropreneurs in hydroponic equipment have diversified their product by selling black jelly leaves and organic fertiliser. Nursery agropreneurs are also involved in poultry. Beverage agropreneurs have diversified their product by selling dumplings, etc. Fried pea crisp agropreneurs also sold homemade cookies. Extracts from the interviews are as follows:

I sell black jelly leave, organic fertiliser too. (Informant 1, 11 September 2021, 8:30 p.m.)

I diversified the product by starting to be involved in poultry activity. (Informant 3, 12 September 2021, 9:00 a.m.)

I also sell dumplings, Arabic breads and dried biscuits. (Informant 4, 12 September 2021, 9:40 a.m.)

I diversified the product by selling homemade cookies. (Informant 6, 12 September 2021, 10:30 a.m.)

The third marketing strategy done by the agropreneurs was practising COD. Extracts from the interview are listed as follows:

I also delivered the product to the customers through the COD method.
(Informant 1, 11 September 2021, 8:30 p.m.)

I did COD to adjacent local customers (within the same district).
(Informant 5, 14 September 2021, 9:00 a.m.)

Financial strategy

In terms of financial strategy, many agropreneurs have minimised the financial burden. For example, a nursery agropreneur said that she did not apply for any bank loan because she was worried about the burden of monthly repayment. A soybean drinks agropreneur stated that as a precaution, he had minimised the debt prior to the pandemic. Moreover, the sour meat agropreneur said she had reduced the number of staff to lessen the financial burden. Extracts from the interview are listed as follows:

I did not apply bank loan because I worried about the burden of monthly repayment. So, I just operated the business base on my own capacity.
(Informant 3, 12 September 2021, 9:00 a.m.)

I had already minimised my debt prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.
(Informant 4, 12 September 2021, 9:40 a.m.)

I had to reduce the number of staff to lessen the financial burden.
(Informant 7, 15 September 2021, 9:00 a.m.)

The second financial strategy employed by agropreneurs is to rely on other jobs. Two hydroponic equipment agropreneurs work as a security guard at a private company and become a freelance draughtsman, respectively. The pre-mixed herbal rice agropreneur is a government pensioner while the fried pea crisp agropreneur is working as a nurse. Thus, they still have the income obtained from other jobs amid the pandemic. Extracts from the interview are listed as follows:

I work as a security guard with a private company. (Informant 1, 11 September 2021, 8:30 p.m.)

Alhamdulillah, I am a government pensioner. (Informant 2, 12 September 2021, 8:20 a.m.)

Yes, I work as a nurse at a hospital. (Informant 6, 12 September 2021, 10:30 a.m.)

I work as a freelance draughtsman to earn a living. (Informant 9, 16 September 2021, 10:00 a.m.)

CONCLUSION

The objectives of the current research are to explore the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis on rural agropreneurs and to describe the business continuity strategies during the crisis. In summary, the impacts of the pandemic can be categorised into two main themes. The first theme was business operation (operation disruption, business closure, product defect and product accumulation). Thus, this research disclosed the negative impacts faced by the rural agropreneurs. The positive impact of COVID-19 is product accumulation, especially in the nursery sector. The second theme was business finance (cash flow problem, access to the stimulus package, and increased price of raw materials).

Meanwhile, two main themes for business continuity strategies were identified. The first strategy was none other than marketing strategy (digital marketing, diversified the products and practising COD). The second strategy was a financial strategy (minimised the financial burden and relied on other jobs). This research found that relying on other jobs is the financial strategy adopted by the part time agropreneurs.

These findings can be a good input to relevant parties to assist the rural agropreneurs to restore their businesses and become prosperous soon. Besides, rural agropreneurs should grab various economic stimulus packages and opportunities to resume their business. With the new norm, all agropreneurs are highly encouraged to strengthen their business continuity strategies, such as digital advertising and digital marketing.

In terms of new knowledge, this research discovered that the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis on rural agropreneurs can be categorised into two main themes, namely business operation and business finance. Those impacts are both positive and negative. Most of the negative impacts are parallel to the previous findings. Nevertheless, this research discovered the positive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis on rural agropreneurs, which is product accumulation, especially in the nursery sector. Two main themes for business continuity strategies were identified, which are marketing strategy and financial strategy. Furthermore, relying on other jobs is the financial strategy adopted by the part-time agropreneurs during the pandemic crisis.

This qualitative research has no attempt to generalise the findings of the study. Nevertheless, the researchers believe the outcomes of the current research are meaningful. This research also has the potential to be explored further by using a quantitative approach with a larger group of rural agropreneurs to understand the impact and business continuity strategies during the pandemic crisis. Besides, since many rural agropreneurs operate their business from home due to the pandemic, future potential research that can be done, such as the need to provide a special space at home for agropreneurship activities, the effects of home-based business operation on neighbours and so forth. Hence, it is strongly believed that the town planners and researchers can assist the agropreneurs to overcome these issues.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was funded by Universiti Teknologi MARA Perak Branch with grant number 900-KPK/PJI/GKIPP/01(0019/2020). The authors would like to express gratitude to all respondents for their valuable contributions to this research.

REFERENCES

- Astro Awani. 2020. Fahami cara COVID-19 beri impak kepada rakyat dan ekonomi. 30 March. <https://www.astroawani.com/berita-malaysia/fahami-cara-covid19-beri-impak-kepada-rakyat-dan-ekonomi-235835> (accessed 27 October 2021).
- Ahmad Rafli Che Omar, Suraiya Ishak and Mohd Abdullah Jusoh. 2020. The impact of COVID-19 movement control order on SMEs' business and survival strategies. *Geografia Malaysian Journal of Society and Space* 16(2): 139–150. <https://doi.org/10.17576/geo-2020-1602-11>
- Austin, Z. and J. Sutton. 2015. Qualitative research: Data collection, analysis, and management. *The Canadian Journal of Hospital Pharmacy* 68(3): 226–231. <https://doi.org/10.4212%2Fcjhp.v68i3.1456>
- Barney, J. 1991. Firm resources and sustained competitive advantage. *Journal of Management* 17(1): 99–120. <https://doi.org/10.1177/014920639101700108>
- Bartik, A.W., M. Bertrand, Z. Cullen, E.L. Glaeser, M. Luca and C Stanton. 2020. The impact of COVID-19 on small business outcomes and expectations. *PNAS* 117(30): 17656–17666. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2006991117>
- Crandall, W.R., J.A. Parnell and J.E. Spillan. 2014. *Crisis management: Leading in the new strategy landscape*. 2nd ed. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Daft, R.L. 2008. *Organization theory and design*. 10th ed. Mason: South-Western, Cengage Learning.

- Dasimah Omar, Kamarul Ariff Omar, Zuriyati Kamaludin, Saberi Othman and Zaharah Mohd Yusoff. 2018. Rural development and the level of public facilities provision for youth in Malaysia. *Planning Malaysia Journal of the Malaysian Institute of Planners* 16(3): 36–45. <https://doi.org/10.21837/pmjournal.v16.i7.498>
- Fabeil, N.F., K.H. Pazim and J. Langgat. 2020. The impact of COVID-19 pandemic crisis on micro-enterprises: Entrepreneurs' perspective on business continuity and recovery strategy. *Journal of Economics and Business* 3(2): 837–844. <https://doi.org/10.31014/aior.1992.03.02.241>
- Gajendrakumar, K.B. and S. Kartheeswari. 2018. An emerging scenario of agropreneurs in the digitized era – courage should not be in muscles, it should be in your will. *Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research* 5(2): 1077–1080.
- Giammarinaro, M.G. 2020. *COVID-19 position paper: The impact and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on trafficked and exploited persons*. New York: United Nations Human Rights Special Procedures.
- Guest, G., A. Bunce and L. Johnson. 2006. How many interviews is enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Method* 18(1): 59–82. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X05279903>
- Jafri Malin Abdullah, Wan Faisham Nu'man Wan Ismail, Irfan Mohamad, Asrenee Ab Razak, Azian Harun, Kamarul Imran Musa and Y.Y. Lee. 2020. A critical appraisal of COVID-19 in Malaysia and beyond. *Malaysian Journal of Medical Sciences* 27(2): 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.21315%2Fmjms2020.27.2.1>
- Mahani Amat and Suraiya Ishak. 2019. Faktor PSiKKIT: Pendorong inovasi pembungkusan dalam kalangan industri kecil dan sederhana berasaskan perusahaan makanan. *GEOGRAFIA Malaysian Journal of Society and Space* 15(3): 90–103. <https://doi.org/10.17576/geo-2019-1503-07>
- Ministry of Health Malaysia. 2021. *COVID-19 cases in Malaysia*. <https://covidnow.moh.gov.my/cases> (accessed 27 October 2021).
- Mohd Fadzil Abdul Rashid, Ana Kashfi Muhamad, Kushairi Rashid, Aizazi Lutfi Ahmad and Muhammad Azrul Azwan Azman. 2021. Formulation of a Malaysia modern rural development framework: Synergising rural for change. *Planning Malaysia Journal of the Malaysian Institute of Planners* 19(2): 14–26.
- Nur Hazirah Hamdan, Salina Kassim and P.C. Lai. 2021. The COVID-19 pandemic crisis on micro-entrepreneurs in Malaysia: Impact and mitigation approaches. *Journal of Global Business and Social Entrepreneurship* 7(20): 52–64.
- Olteanu, A., S. Vieveg and C. Castillo. 2015. What to expect when the unexpected happens: Social media communications across crises. In *CSCW'15: Proceedings of the 18th ACM Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work & Social Computing*, 994–1009. New York: Association for Computing Machinery. <https://doi.org/10.1145/2675133.2675242>
- PLANMalaysia. 2017. *National rural physical planning plan 2030*. Putrajaya: Ministry of Housing and Local Government.
- Porter, M.E. 1981. The contributions on industrial organization to strategic management. *Academy of Management Review* 6(4): 609–620. <https://doi.org/10.2307/257639>

- Walker, J.L. 2012. The use of saturation in qualitative research. *Canadian Journal of Cardiovascular Nursing* 22(2): 37–46.
- Warnier, V., X. Weppe and X. Lecocq. 2013. Extending resource-based theory: Considering strategic, ordinary and junk resources. *Management Decision* 51(7): 1359–1379. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MD-05-2012-0392>
- WHO (World Health Organization). 2020. Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) situation reports. <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports> (accessed 1 August 2020).
- _____. 2021. WHO coronavirus (COVID-19) dashboard. <https://covid19.who.int/> (accessed 27 October 2021).