

# Retail and Wholesale Travel Business Survival Strategy During Pandemic Period in Bandung, Indonesia

Ina Veronika Ginting<sup>1(⋈)</sup>, Rr. Adi Hendraningrum<sup>2</sup>, and Wishnu Hartanto<sup>2</sup>

Doctoral Program of Tourism Studies Program, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, Indonesia ina.veronika15@gmail.com
NHI Bandung Tourism Institute, Bandung, Indonesia

**Abstract.** One of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic is the global collapse of the tourism industry's business. The bankruptcy of the tourism industry affects the transportation business, hotels, tourist attractions, tourism organizations, and travel agencies. The travel business is related to the network of the tourism industry. The regulations of tourist movement from the government also influence the sustainability of this travel business. This study aims to analyze the travel business survival strategy, especially the strategy to maintain sustainability and business improvements which are carried out during the current pandemic. The research method used is qualitative. The data are obtained from in-depth interviews with some retail and wholesale travel business entrepreneurs who were affected by the pandemic in Bandung, Indonesia. Interview with travel agent and wholesale entrepreneurs reveal taken by company leaders in maintaining new strategies to continue their existence. The results of this study show that the leadership steps in the organization solve problems and survive during the covid 19 crisis. The strategy for new business by examining the phenomenon of market needs during a pandemic. While the strategy used for business continuity the travel business sustainability strategy can be done by conducting the innovations that are carried out by examining the phenomenon of the market demands during this pandemic. Travel business improvements were made during the pandemic by developing business strategy models that can be sustainable, including the incorporation of the use of digital technology and human touch services to customers. The application of the Cleanliness, Hygiene, Sanitary, Environment (CHSE) discipline in the travel business is also considered by generating customers' trust. Besides that, cost-effectiveness needed to be indispensable in dealing with the travel business in times of crisis. The implications of this research are expected to be a role model for other travel business entrepreneurs in maintaining the sustainability of travel business life during the new normal.

Keywords: Travel Business · Strategy · Impact · COVID-19

# 1 Introduction

The emergence of COVID-19, originating from Wuhan, China in 2022, has caused serious global unrest. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a restriction on people's

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travel movements to prevent the spread of the virus. PATA (2020), the International Association of the Travel Industry in the Asia Pacific, reported that there were 4500 cases of travel companies that were significantly affected by COVID-19. Global data from UNWTO (2020) shows that in early April 2020, around 96% of destinations had banned travel in response to this pandemic. Many tourist destinations are closed in part or in whole due to the prohibition of flights for airlines to those destinations. Travel restrictions hurt the tourism industry and the world travel industry, including in Indonesia. The Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy stated that nationally, the potential loss of national tourism reaches up to US \$4 billion, or 54.52 trillion Rupiah, where this potential loss comes from a decline in tourists from various countries (Come Bandung, 2020). Based on regional data from various businesses in West Java Province, there are almost 2,768 tourism businesses, including the Travel Bureau and wholesalers. The West Java government has implemented a local lockdown and quarantine of the region. Restriction on all community activities makes Travel Bureau business entrepreneurs unable to carry out travel business activities. The chairman of the West Java Travel Association (ASITA) said that almost 90% of the travel agent and wholesaler companies that were members of ASITA closed due to the absence of tourist movement as the main driving force for the travel business. The chairman of the Indonesian Travel Agent Association (ASTINDO) also stated that 98% of his members had to close temporarily because their business also focuses on ticketing, travel documents, and tours. Travel consultants and wholesalers face many challenges, including initial efforts to overcome cancellations, refunds, and rebooking without any compensation.

This crisis is increasingly worsening the condition of the travel agent business. (David, Haris., World Travel Council). Travel agency companies are forced to work with great efficiency to maintain their business. Organizational leaders must focus on how to reopen, recover businesses, and start new business models by adapting to the crisis. Employees are the most at risk, so it is necessary to build individual resilience during times of crisis. Various ways must be found to overcome the crisis by finding or adopting the right way within the organization to overcome it. This will minimize the negative impact on the company's stakeholders during the COVID-19 period. (Khalil M. Dirani, 2020).

This study will discuss how the leaders in organizations solve problems related to the COVID-19 crisis, which has an impact on travel companies. The company's strategic decision-making and strategic planning were affected by the pandemic, as was its tendency to focus on innovation during the pandemic. And what are the strategies used for continuation of travel business during pandemic.

### 2 Literature Review

#### 2.1 Model Business Travel

Domestic and international travel restrictions make the travel business helpless. This is a great surprise for the world of travel business as an intermediary business and tourism business globally. Lockdowns in tourist destination countries have resulted in the termination of international and domestic flights, transportation rentals, cruises, travel arrangements, hotels, restaurants, tourist attractions, historic sites, and national parks as

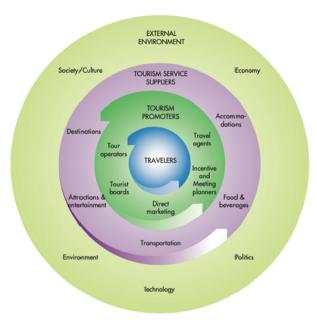


Fig. 1. Integrated Model in Tourism (Cook, Hsu, Tailor 2018)

a result. At the same time, tourism is an industry that is sensitive to the ups and downs of the economy and at the same time can recover quickly when the economy improves. The impact experienced by other industries is not as severe as that experienced by the tourism industry. (Cook, Shu, Tailor, 2018).

Figure 1 below shows the important forces shaping the dynamic and interrelated model of the tourism industry. This model shows how the travel business relates to tourists, tourism service suppliers as internal factors, and the economy, politics, the environment, technology, and social/culture factors. The COVID-19 pandemic crisis demands that travel agents and wholesalers determine business decisions and priorities to sustain and recover business. The three main support systems that help in maintaining and building a travel business are financial support, marketing, and further business funding (Linda, 2021).

The very sluggish growth of tourism during the pandemic has hurt the retail travel business. The complex nature of tourism products during the pandemic forces retailers to pay attention to information, negotiation, finance, booking payments, physical ownership, promotion, and business pick-up. (Buhalis, Dimitros, Costa, Carlos, 2006).

Retail Travel Agency sell tourism product directly to the public on behalf of product suppliers and in return get commission. Retail travel agency is defined as a business that performs the following functions: quotes fares, rate, make reservation, arrange travel tickets and accommodation, arrange travel insurance, foreign currency, documents and accepts payment. The main source of revenue for a retail travel agency is the commission received from the vendors. The Wholesale travel agencies is specialised in organising package tours, which are marked to the customers/tourist through the network of retail travel agency or directly to the prospective clients. A wholesale travel agency purchases

tourism product components in bulk and design package tour. Sometimes, a wholesale travel agency buys travel component from a vendor in bulk and resells them to another travel business organisation. (Chand 2000).

## 2.2 Strategy Business

Strategy is an organization's goals and pathways to achieving them. Travel companies must consider and respond to the unexpected COVID situation in the travel business. Strategies to survive the impact of unexpected situations need to be redesigned. The business strategy is determined according to the size and type of the company. Building a strategy has 3 stages, namely: the realization of the required strategic decisions, making strategic decisions, and implementing decisions. (Whitehead, Jo., 2011). The decision taken by the leadership is a major deal for the fate of the travel company. The strategy taken must pay attention to the external environment, the internal environment, the developing situation, the main problem, the available options, and the best choice. Travel companies need to be quick to make the best choices at difficult times. The choicesetting strategy used must be combined with an intuitive approach, data and analysis, strategy concepts, strategy tools and frameworks. The strategy taken is inseparable from risk. Risk treatment includes the company's efforts to select the right options to reduce the occurrence of the risk. The selection of the right risk needs to consider the cost and effort of its implementation. Another consideration of the survival strategy is to pay attention to operational, regulation, social responsibility, financial impact, and environmental aspects. All stakeholders must be informed of the treatment and decision-making on the application of risk. Travel retail companies and wholesalers need to evaluate, monitor, and re-evaluate the decisions that were taken. (Susilo, Leo, J., Kaho, Viktor Riwu., 2011).

The crises that barrage between crises are quite short during a pandemic and are very difficult for entrepreneurs. The recovery time for the travel business is also getting longer due to the COVID-19 crisis, which is coming in turn, causing the government to introduce regulations to restrict domestic and international movement. This travel restriction has caused a subprime mortgage crisis and a chain impact on tourism companies. Employers must evaluate and then implement new strategies to maintain business by recruiting new workers, reinvesting in existing operations and conducting business expansion. (Kasali, 2014).

# 2.3 COVID-19 in Business

Business operations need to consider various considerations including the risk of COVID-19. Business vulnerability to disasters comes from various factors, including physical location, business operational conditions, characteristics, and the surrounding community. Business vulnerabilities can come not only from the potential for harmful physical impacts, but also from social conditions and trends that make certain businesses and types less able to deal with "environmental shocks" including disasters. (Cutter, 1996; Cutter, Mitchell, & Scott., 2000; Dahlhamer, 1998). COVID-19 is included in a virus outbreak that is considered non-natural because the pandemic has a national and even global effect (Ruwan et al., 2020), so the management aspect of risk is an important

thing for considering future business. The impact of a disaster consists of three, namely direct, indirect, and rippled impacts (Tierney, 2007). The next consideration is the problem of the operational part, the load faced, and the level of recovery that occurs. This study aims to see how retail and wholesale travel agents are affected in determining the travel business sustainability strategy and what business model will be carried out after facing the impact of COVID-19. The impact of COVID-19 on consumers is estimated to be greatly affected. The interactions between producers and consumers have changed significantly. Distribution channels have a very important role. The Supply chains need to be more flexible and adapt to the evolving challenges. Travel restrictions have given a tremendous boost to the eCommerce sector and the use of technology. (Tardivo, 2020). The resources, processes, and values of the company greatly determine the company's ability to respond to the attacks of being disrupted by COVID-19. The risk that is accepted also changes, thus forcing them to form new values. Executives need to engineer new values as well as form a new mindset. They must determine the steps to initiate the initiation of innovation in business. (Christensen, 2006).

Technology is an absolute service provider during a pandemic. Guest engagement must be matched with technology engagement. Customer relationship management is still needed to provide efficient and effective services. To reduce employee costs, many retail travel agents must use more interactive technology. Efficiency is felt to be of greater benefit than overcoming the cost of human resources through technology. Automated technology systems can replace human work and can be operated from home by several frontline travel agents and wholesalers (Roy a, Cathy Hsu, Taylor, and Lorraine, 2018). Technology allows businesses to share information quickly with virtual meetings.

# 3 Methodology

Collecting data in this study has 2 stages. The first stage of the research is to observe the issues and problems that have arisen during COVID-19 from 2020 to 2021. This observation was made through the expression of travel business problems by members of the Association of the Indonesian Tours and Travel Agencies (ASITA) in Bandung, West Java Province. In addition, observations we made through interviews conducted by the mass media with travel business actors during COVID-19 at this stage, the focus is on the first wave, which has many unknown surprises and has a severe impact. Economic stimulus is highly regulated by government regulations.

The operational problems should be borne and how the level of business recovery must be faced to determine the continuity of strategy business retail and wholesale. The second stage is to determine the sources, namely the four owners and entrepreneurs of the travel agents and wholesalers who are very affected in Bandung. In-depth interviews were conducted with travel business entrepreneurs in Bandung. They are three of the owner of travel agent retails and one of the owners of wholesale who have been running the travel business more than 10 years. Two of informants are the chairman of Travel Business Association of West Java and the information was represented many retail travel agents and wholesales which are their associations members. Interviews were conducted regarding the impacts of COVID-19 on the travel business, survival strategies, and travel business sustainability strategies during the recovery phase of COVID-19. The data

obtained will be used as material for analytical studies regarding the survival strategy of the retail travel business in Bandung for three months. The data collection technique used was the structure interview. Interviews were conducted so the authors could find out the depth of data needed based on the business concept of business survival. Information technology will reduce search and transaction costs incurred by customers and producers in the real-time driving product offerings. (Kaali, 2019) The data taken is an indicator of the concept of the travel business survival namely: building a strategy has 3 stages, namely: the realization of the required strategic decisions, making strategic decisions, and implementing decisions. (Whitehead, Jo., 2011).

#### 4 Result and Discussion

# 4.1 The Impact of Covid on Travel Business

Based on previous research of researcher, the majority of travel agents affected by COVID-19 in Bandung, have been established for more than 10 years. This travel business has both a large and small business scale. The actual market for travel companies is focused on the domestic market at 15%, foreign tours at 7%, a combination of domestic and foreign at 40%. Travel products sold by travel agents and wholesalers in Bandung are tour packages, accounting for 89% of both domestic outbound and inbound tours, 57% of airline ticket sales, transportation (44%), event organisers (46%), accommodations (55%), travel documents (53%), and Hajj and Umrah packages (1.8%).

This business is engaged in managing domestic, inbound, and outbound tourist trips. According to the travel association in Bandung (ASTINDO), the decline in sales of travel products by 75% began to occur in the first quarter of 2019 (January-April) since the city of Wuhan in China announced a lockdown. Sales of travel products were almost non-existent, which caused many agents and wholesalers to temporarily close their businesses in the first quarter (January-April 2020). The COVID-19 conditions that came repeatedly with the emergence of various variants had an impact on government regulations regarding travel restrictions both in Indonesia and abroad. These travel restrictions have a multiplier impact on the global and Indonesian tourism industries.

#### 4.2 Travel Agent Business Survival Strategy

Travel agents and wholesaler companies in Bandung have different survival strategies according to the strategy determined by each company. This survival strategy is determined by the size of the company and the organization. Various kinds of strategic options must be considered in conjunction with risk reduction efforts. The impact of the absence of business operations, the cancellation booking process, and the refund process will interfere with the company's finances. In critical conditions during the pandemic, travel companies must have a strategy to survive. Defensive strategies are selected, defined, and evaluated regularly. The first strategy is to look for other business opportunities that can support the travel business, which is getting worse. Reading market needs during a pandemic generates new business opportunities. Most travel companies that are not too big do new business related to food for repeater customers or the new customers,

delivery services by creating a delivery service application and using the company's transportation and their staffs, medical equipment and services, tourism news journalism by utilising the company website. The big travel agent also has a survival strategy by branding the company by using social media. The strategy of big retail company is lay-off employees in the staff categories and take salary cut of up 60%. The new business is created by creating programs such as webinars on training to upskilling the staff competencies and paid virtual tours both domestically and internationally by social media to maintaining the customer loyalty to the company's product.

The wholesale company has a strategy with the contingency plan namely by making the hybrid office working from home by using a connected company system both at a office or at the staff's devices. The merger of several branch offices and the similar divisions were carried out to reduce employees. The marketing programs for the domestic market are still carried out during the pandemic. Travel agents and wholesaler companies also introduce and implement government programmes continuously regarding Clean, Health, Safety and the Environment (CHSE) to the public. This is done to build good relations, loyalty, and public trust in the tourism business.

The realisation of the survival strategy continuously requires paying attention to external and internal conditions of the company. The business opportunity efforts that have been executed were not able to help the travel business yet and also to maintain the companies' financial condition as in normal conditions. The second strategy is financial efficiency. Efficiency is carried out by monitoring cash flow and making adjustments to company operations. Reducing electricity use, resizing office building rentals, and implementing work from home are considered to be able to help the company's cash flow. Deteriorating conditions force companies to sell a lot of their assets to cover their debts and instalments to the bank. The unavoidable result is a reduction in the employee's salary. For the first three months, the deduction is made for managers at as much as 30% and staff at 20% of their salaries. In the second three months, the deduction is 50% for managers and 30% for staff. Reductions continue to occur, even up to the resignation offer for employees. Many companies were forced to lose nearly 60% of their employees as they were the most valuable asset of the company.

#### 4.3 Travel Business Company Sustainability Strategy

Another consideration as sustainable strategy should pay attention to operational, regulation, social responsible, financial impact, environmental aspect. The treatment and application of decision making should communicate with all stakeholder such as employee, owner, customers and related industries.

The government provides vaccines for the entire community to make conditions better. Travel restrictions began to be reduced, and people's courage to travel also began to grow. The travel agent leadership began to focus on how to solve the next problem, which is opening and restoring the travel business. Business recovery requires a new strategy. The effectiveness of governments and regulators, who on a global basis must establish the threshold minimum standards and address quarantine restrictions and travel barriers to facilitate the return of travel, is critical, as is the introduction of effective vaccines. (World Tourism Council, 2020).

The involvement and role of the government in loosening regulations provide new hope for assistance to tourism stakeholders, including refreshment with professional training, free vaccinations, and health insurance assistance (BPJS) for employees of the travel business. Cash assistance of 1,5 million rupiahs was given to each travel agent, although the amount was not significant enough to revive a slumping travel business. The beginning of the restructuring is the company's credit payments to banks. The recovery strategy taken by the travel agent is the company's financial reform. Many financial institutions offer capital loans with fairly low-interest rates to travelling entrepreneurs. This offer must be observed so it does not increase the company's debt burden because many assets have been sold during the pandemic. Capital loans must be analysed according to the needs of the company. Contingency plans need to be taken into account when facing a similar or more severe crisis. Financial remapping and cash flow monitoring with financial operational adjustments are still carried out regularly. Finance must be monitored and calculated every six month when the business will be started. The company recalls staff who have been laid off or recruits new staff to fill the required positions, such as frontline, staff, finance staff, and marketing staff who understand technology. The leaders of travel agents and wholesalers began to design more efficient work models based on technology.

The effective and effective services at the crisis time need to be done by reducing employee costs by using the technology. The efficiency is the better benefit to overcome the cost for human resources through technology. The automated technology system can replace human work and can be operated from home by several travel agency and wholesale frontlines with integrated working system. Making this model definitely requires a large investment as well as a program model that is adaptable to the needs of crisis and new normal. This model is expected to be able to do work and monitor work from anywhere. This model means all employees do not have to return to the office for their duties and responsibilities. At the beginning of 2021, overseas easing such as tours to Turkey, Malaysia, Thailand, and several other countries had been opened, making the travel business start to squirm. International flights have also been allowed to operate again. Domestic travel and some international travel reopened the travel and wholesaler businesses. Entrepreneurs must continue to observe this improvement by learning from experience in dealing with previous crises. According to entrepreneurs, changes in tourist behaviour patterns have changed a lot during the COVID-19 period.

An innovation idea arises from two sources: an intrinsic one based on creative thinking with "ideation", and an extrinsic one based on market data by searching for unful-filled needs by approaching original ideas for new products and services (Goldenberg, Jacob., Mazursky, David., 2002). Changes in travel business patterns must also make adjustments to tourist behaviour patterns. These changes include the discipline of health protocols, the selection of tour package products that are more natural, and the selection of tourist facilities that are implementing CHSE. Another pattern change is the use of technology as a way of choosing tourism products and communicating with operators and travel agents. These conditions change the pattern of the travel business from a conventional way into a technology-based and digital business. Continually seeking new systems and technologies to reduce costs, increase sales and improve the traveller experience. Because of this need for continuous innovation, investments in technology

are becoming increasingly important. Information Technology (IT) will play a major role, but some other technical innovations and trends need to be considered in the future (Nicula. Virgil, Elena. Popsa Roxana.,2014). Even though business changes are starting to adjust to digitalization, travel agents still feel the need for direct "human touch" services to tourists, especially in handling tours. The business knowledge like online marketing techniques, product delivery procedures, new product development, costing and pricing strategy, during crisis and customer database management could serve as a basis of crisis management plan for travel business not only for retail travel agent but also for wholesale.

Innovation for new normal integrated working system application should be created in order being to be controlled or monitored by the companies' leaders. Thus, creating this application will need big invest but it can give the effectivity of integrated long-distance working. This system can reduce cost of daily employees' needs. Tourism products are being offered through campaigns with social media, virtual travel fairs with airlines and tourism actors from other countries. Promotions through offline travel fairs and with travel business-people are considered very effective in giving confidence back to prospective travel agent customers. New product innovations in the form of tour initiatives and special tours are mostly produced to meet the needs of tourists.

### 5 Conclusion

In the crisis period, travel agents must focus on how to overcome crisis conditions in the travel business. In addition to health problems, financial problems are the biggest problem for travel companies due to the absence of operations and income during the pandemic. Employees are the riskiest assets in the company. Various ways should be explored to adopt the right way to deal with the crisis. The strategy adopted must be able to reduce the negative impact on all stakeholders in a travel company. The strategy taken is to rethink cost-effective business models. The travel agent business is an intermediary business that is very dependent on other suppliers, so it is deemed necessary to develop other businesses as the main supporter of the travel business. The business knowledge like online marketing techniques, product delivery procedures, new product development, costing and pricing strategy, during crisis and customer database management could serve as a basis of crisis management plan for travel business not only for retail travel agent but also for wholesale.

Innovation for new normal integrated working system application should be created in order being to be controlled or monitored by the companies' leaders. So creating this application will need big invest but it can give the effectivity of integrated long distance working. This system can reduce cost of daily employees' needs.

In this research the authors have found the long-distance working is one of new way out of travel business survival from the crisis condition.

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