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Unfolding the Impacts of a Prolonged COVID-19 Pandemic on the Sustainability of Culinary Tourism: Some Insights from Micro and Small Street Food Vendors

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Abstract: Our study reveals the impacts of various COVID-19-related restrictions on the culinary tourism industry by exploring how street food vendors deal with this unprecedented encounter. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews of 20 street food vendors and later analyzed using qualitative data analysis, focusing on the thematic analysis of coded interview transcripts, as a basis for generalization of our findings. This study unfolds the knock-on effects of the lock-down, social distancing, and movement restrictions imposed on the street food vendors and sheds light on how the culinary tourism industry can become more resilient and sustainable in facing a future or recurring pandemic. Understanding the dynamic impacts of the pandemic will offer insights for the culinary tourism industry and the government in the development of relevant policies to alleviate those impacts and protect the culinary tourism industry in the ‘new normal’ post-pandemic era.

Keywords: culinary tourism; street food; COVID-19; dynamic capabilities; entrepreneurial learning; business resilience



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1. Introduction

Food has always been an integral part of the tourism experience. For some tourists, food could even become the primary motivation to visit a destination [1,2] and to relish the culinary experience [3]. The culinary tourism phenomenon generates many socio-economic benefits, and one of them is to open opportunities for street food vendors to strengthen, enrich and differentiate what a destination could offer [4]. Street food vendors are hereby defined as those vendors who are engaged in culinary work and are selling food and drinks on the roadside, in kiosks or in non-permanent cafés. This definition is derived from a combination of the definition of ‘street vendors’ [5–7] and ‘street food’ from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO). These vendors have relatively low skills and education levels [8–10] and operate with relatively low resources. Most of them suffer from a lack of legal support from the government (i.e., uncertain regulations) [11] and are often harassed by civil authorities [8,12,13] or socio-spatially excluded [14]. This is the definition of street food vendors used in this study.

As many parts of the world began to understand the true impact of the COVID-19 pandemic at the beginning of 2020, people were confined to their homes, and their movements were restricted as governments stepped up social distancing to confine the spread of the virus. Offices and commercial centers were closed, attending schools and universities was cancelled, and hotels and restaurants were also forced to shut. These measures have subsequently forced many businesses, including those in the culinary industry, to rethink their business models to be more sustainable [15], as many tourism destinations have been shut down, causing increased job losses and financial hardship.

Bandung is the capital city of West Java Province, Indonesia. It has plenty of tourist attractions ranging from cultural, heritage to shopping attractions. In addition to those attractions, the local food in this city has also enticed many visitors. Its unique culinary products, such as martabak, tapioca starch and lomie noodles, have made Bandung one of the best-known culinary tourism destinations in Indonesia. The city has long recognized its tourists' styles, tastes and flavors, manifested by creating a wide range of innovative culinary varieties [16]. Amongst the many culinary varieties in Bandung, street food is perhaps the most well-known. The number of street food vendors has proliferated in recent years and easy access into the city from the surrounding towns has allowed the Bandung culinary tourism industry to flourish, as people constantly seek new lifestyles to escape from daily routines [17].

Most of its visitors are local tourists from other cities around Bandung. Several studies have discussed its role as a culinary tourism destination, (e.g., [16,18–20]). As one of the most populated cities in Indonesia, the proliferation of street food vendors in Bandung has become inevitable. They open their businesses on almost every corner of the city, especially in high-density areas. Although most of their target market is local people, visitors who have come to this city also experience enjoyment in consuming their products. Street food vendors in Bandung offer regular local and traditional food, but some have also made some innovations in their products, which has created new food trends in Bandung.

With the widespread pandemic of COVID-19, the impacts on the culinary tourism industry, especially street food vendors in Bandung, have been unimaginable. Nonetheless, as we are just beginning to unveil and understand its unprecedented impacts on our well-being, the impacts on the culinary tourism industry appear to be understudied. Our paper seeks to fill this gap by exploring how street food vendors in Bandung have dealt with this unique encounter, adapted to the compulsory restrictions during the pandemic and become resilient. We provide academic and practical contributions by (1) unfolding the knock-on effects of lock-down, social distancing, and movement restrictions on the street food vendors and (2) understanding how they have overcome and mitigated these impacts, using the dynamic capabilities [21] as the theoretical lens.

The term dynamic refers to the capacity to renew competencies to achieve congruence with changing business environments where innovative responses are required, technological change is rapid, and unpredicted competition and markets exist. Capabilities refer to organizational skills, resources, and functional competencies needed to align with the changing environment [22,23]. Understanding these dynamics will offer insights for the culinary tourism industry to alleviate impacts and protect the industry post-COVID-19.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. We first present the theoretical underpinning of dynamic capabilities upon which our research was based. We then describe how we conducted our research, in particular the approaches to data collection and analysis. We proceed to elaborate the findings of our research to shed light on how the street food vendors overcome the impacts of the pandemic. Finally, we conclude the paper by discussing the contributions of our research and our future work.

2. Theoretical Underpinning

In carrying out routine business activities and dealing with problems that occur regularly, companies need to have substantive capabilities to solve common problems [24]. However, increasingly uncertain and rapidly changing external business environments, especially during the global COVID-19 pandemic, can threaten the sustainability of a business. Therefore, companies need to develop their dynamic capabilities to maintain competitive advantages [21,24]. Zahra et al. [24] (p. 918) define dynamic capabilities as “the abilities to reconfigure a firm’s resources and routines in the manner envisioned and deemed appropriate by its principal decision-maker(s)”. This definition focuses on changes within the firm. Another definition, by Teece et al. [21] (p. 516), adds an explanation of why the changes are necessary as: “the firm’s ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competences to address rapidly changing environments”. Thus, during a

global COVID-19 pandemic that is full of uncertainties, dynamic capabilities have played critical roles in the attainment of business sustainability.

In order to overcome the uncertainty of the external business environment, companies need to be able to flexibly adjust within their internal organization structures. The ability to change or reconfigure substantive capabilities is also a form of dynamic capability [24]. Moreover, Teece [25] suggests that, ideally, these dynamic capabilities function to adapt to the rapidly changing business environment and create innovations that can restructure the business ecosystem, placing the firm in a more secure position within the market. Concerning the adaptation and innovation, Dixon et al. [26] divide the dynamic capabilities into two: dynamic adaptation capabilities and dynamic innovation capabilities. They explain that both these dynamic capabilities are essential to maintain and build competitive advantage in the short and long term. The notion of the dynamic capabilities approach and its relationship to innovation is sourced from Schumpeter's innovation-based competition [27].

Teece [25,28] proposed a dynamic capabilities model consisting of three stages. The first stage is sensing (and shaping), which is capable of analyzing and sensing opportunities and threats. The second stage is seizing, which explains the company's ability to capture and capitalize on opportunities. In this stage, top management redesigns and refines the business model, synergizing the company's products, processes, and services to match potential business opportunities. The last stage is reconfiguring/transforming, where top management needs to reconfigure existing resources within the company in line with business development and changes in the external environment. Pavlou and El Sawy [27] proposed a measurable model of dynamic capabilities following Teece et al. [21] and Teece [25], consisting of sensing, learning, coordinating, and integrating capabilities.

Many studies have investigated the concept of dynamic capabilities. Specific within the food and beverage industry, Duarte Alonso et al. [29] conducted a study on restaurant operators in Peru. They proposed a framework that could benefit the development of culinary tourism from the perspective of restaurant operators using the resource-based view and dynamic capabilities. A quantitative study by Otengei et al. [30] analyzes the relationship of dynamic capabilities toward the inward internationalization of ethnic restaurants in East Africa. They found that those who implement three capabilities (i.e., cultural orientation, market orientation, service innovation) enhanced inward internationalization. Much attention has been given to the implementation of dynamic capabilities in various types of business. Nevertheless, there is a lack of studies concerning the application of this approach in micro and informal businesses such as street food vending businesses. Even though some studies have been conducted to analyze the dynamic capabilities of informal businesses [31,32], it is still unclear how micro and small street food vendors, especially in the developing world, utilize their dynamic capabilities to overcome the current global COVID-19 pandemic situation.

3. Research Method

3.1. Research Approach

We adopted the qualitative research approach. The data were collected using semi-structured one-to-one interviews with 20 street food vendors in the city of Bandung, Indonesia, to select respondents from varying businesses to generalize our findings. While traveling was still permitted, we visited their food stalls in different parts of the city to meet them face-to-face, but later on, when travel restrictions were imposed, we continued by using phone interviews.

The street food (and drinks) vendors we chose ranged from sellers of milk drinks, meatballs, churros, sticky-rice, fried rice, martabak, starch-balls, dim sum, lomie noodles, chocolate drinks, red ginger drinks, home-made food, savory crisps, cookies, Korean food, cake and bakery, yoghurt drinks, traditional snacks, chicken noodles and tapioca starch. These vendors are popular among both residents and tourists from outside Bandung. They were selected from a local trade's culinary list using the convenience sampling method. Some of those chosen were still in business at the time the interviews took place, while

others had switched to closing their businesses but were still willing to be interviewed. Fifteen vendors continued to operate their businesses; three closed their stalls but switched to online, while two completely halted their businesses. The respondent group consisted of one female and nineteen males. Their length of time in business ranged from two to 15 years, and the selling prices ranged from ca IDR 10,000 to IDR 100,000. The profiles of the culinary businesses are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Profiles of the interviewee.

	Culinary Business	Years in Business	Turnover/Month (IDR)
1.	Milk drinks	3	45–60 million
2.	Meatballs	4	45–54 million
3.	Churros	4	3–4.5 million
4.	Sticky-rice	6	45–84 million
5.	Fried rice	6	45–90 million
6.	Martabak	4	180–210 million
7.	Starch-balls	2	69–90 million
8.	Dim sum	3	90–120 million
9.	Lomie noodles	15	60–75 million
10.	Chocolate drinks	3	130–170 million
11.	Red ginger drinks	3	5–7 million
12.	Home-made food	10	6–8 million
13.	Savory crisps	14	5–10 million
14.	Cookies	5	5–9 million
15.	Korean food	13	5–7 million
16.	Cake and bakery	5	6–9 million
17.	Yoghurt drinks	3	3–5 million
18.	Traditional snacks	13	4–6 million
19.	Chicken noodles	5	10–15 million
20.	Tapioca starch	15	20–30 million

3.2. Data Collection

We adopted purposive sampling, i.e., a small number of people “nested in their context and studied in-depth” and “not wholly pre-specified but can evolve” [33]. The interviews were conducted from April 2020 to July 2021. We initially focused the questioning on the impacts of the pandemic on their culinary businesses. However, upon in-depth probing, many unintended issues pertinent to the impacts were unveiled. The interviews were conducted in Indonesian and lasted about 30–45 min. Each interview was audio-recorded with respondents’ consent, transcribed, and translated into English. Some examples of the interview questions are shown in Appendix A (Tables A1 and A2).

3.3. Data Analysis

We applied an inductive approach to analyze the interview transcripts and aggregated the interview data into several codes [34]. The a priori codes created were, for instance, ‘impacts on operations’, ‘impacts on employees’, ‘impact on households’, ‘impacts on social lives’, ‘future business strategies’, and ‘government policies’. Along with some post hoc codes, e.g., ‘out of comfort zones’, ‘inept at digital technology’, ‘anticipatory steps’, the a priori codes were then organized into four main themes, shown in the Appendix A. For each interview script, the passages were marked and highlighted, and the resultant themes were then discussed in order to agree [35] before the final theme was eventually agreed. Although rather time-consuming, the coding process allowed the emerging themes to be discussed more thoroughly amongst the researchers.

4. Findings

4.1. Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Street Food Vendors

Travelling restrictions simply meant a significant decline in sales, severely crippling the street vendors’ ability to cover their operational costs. For instance, most of the vendors

being interviewed rented their stalls, so they struggled to keep up with the cost of renting; some of them did not receive any refund from their upfront payment for the rental period. Some vendors, however, thankfully received some financial leeway from their landlords, who allowed them to delay the payment.

“Unfortunately, we still have to pay the rent, but the landlord gave us some time to pay” (Noodle vendor).

“Alhamdulillah the landlord gave us leeway, one-month free rental . . . if this is not extended, at least we hope to get some discounts, but we have not heard from him [the landlord]” (Martabak vendor).

Increased operating costs were also mainly due to the unavailability of raw materials, hence higher costs. The high cost of some critical ingredients forced some vendors to reduce their food menus significantly, so they only offered a menu dependent on the availability of key ingredients.

“Some raw materials are scarce, and they are expensive!” (Sticky-rice vendor).

“They [raw materials] are pricey . . . and difficult to find because the supply is lacking. Many items were sold out as the factory simply could not make them. From 15 variants of dim sum, we were reduced to six to eight variants” (Dim sum vendor).

Labor costs also had a significant impact on the vendors' operating costs. Some vendors had no choice but to temporarily lay off their employees, while others managed to keep the number to a minimum. Those who laid off their employees admitted that they had no means of covering their salaries. Upon further probing, it was found that those laid-off employees had returned to the villages. Some worked on the fields, others selling snacks. Those who managed to retain their employees offered reduced salaries, either a flat rate reduction or changes to hourly rates. Another issue was raised by one respondent who mentioned the pandemic coinciding with the fasting month of Ramadan, which the Eid celebration will follow. Eid is the biggest festive season in Indonesia, and customarily, as part of its celebration, employers offer financial bonuses to their employees. However, this time around, they had no choice but to cut or even abolish the Eid bonuses in some cases.

“ . . . no choice but to temporarily lay them off . . . they had their last wage, but not sure about the Eid bonus, we will see . . . ” (Fried rice vendor)

“They [staff] are all commission-based workers, so they are at home now as the shop is closed” (Churros vendor)

The reduced sales turnover affected the vendors' households. Although, in general, they could still meet their basic needs, it became impossible to meet the secondary needs, let alone have any savings. Some vendors had no choice but to use their savings to temporarily finance the business operating costs and daily household needs at the same time.

“No doubt, a big impact on our household! We need to think twice before buying to avoid unnecessary expenditure” (Milk vendor)

“ . . . we played catch-up with our incomings and outgoings, almost impossible to save. In fact, we used some of our personal savings to cover costs [of operations]” (Fried rice vendor)

Upon further probing, it was revealed that household problems were not solely related to financial matters. With the enactment of work-from-home, families ran their businesses from home and simultaneously took care of their households. In some cases, this had caused much stress and fatigue. As a result, some respondents reported occurrences of minor family conflicts. Concerns arose from household members who had no choice but to open their stalls. They were somehow anxious that they had been infected or became a carrier risking the elderly and children at home.

“ . . . my wife is working full time from home. We met more often, but high work pressure sometimes caused arguments and rows over trivial things” (Churros vendor)

The social distancing rules severely disrupted their social lives. Although gatherings with friends and family might be done virtually via electronic means, they felt these communication media simply could not replace the physical, face-to-face meetings. Activities at places of worship were also restricted. Limited collaboration meetings with clients or business partners were also severely hampered, and this was aggravated by the difficulty in obtaining trusted, credible information about their surrounding environments.

"Yeah, [we have] almost no contacts with our mates. Well, I suppose via Zoom . . . but [there is] no substitute for physical contacts" (Sticky-rice vendor)

"Funny that we signed business agreements and commitments via online meetings" (Dim sum vendor)

The Eid celebration is also closely associated with meeting family members in their home-towns or villages. However, the travel ban forced them to remain, creating social problems as people could not work, increasing unemployment.

"The first time in my life I could not visit my parents during the Eid. It is sad . . . " (Starch meatballs vendor)

4.2. Overcoming the Impacts

Interestingly, the majority of the vendors being interviewed did not consider turning into other businesses. They believed that those affected by this pandemic were both the culinary industry and other sectors, so they maintained their existing businesses. Most of them were confident that staying in business was the best choice instead of switching to other businesses that could be even more uncertain in the current climate.

The vendors had depicted various ways to overcome and mitigate the impacts of the pandemic; some are more adventurous than others. Some vendors considered switching to the face mask production business but then changed their minds because the competition turned out to be fiercer. Some took over their parents' businesses and further developed them.

"For sure. Me and my wife were thinking of stopping our sticky-rice business and switched to face mask production. But everyone seems to have the same idea, more competition, [it's] not worth it!" (Sticky rice vendor)

Those who decided to change their businesses followed different strategies, including switching to online ventures (omnichannel sales), better customer relationship management, and product diversification.

Due to the limited mobility of consumers, many business activities were carried out online, including buying food. Therefore, in facing this new trend, the vendors had to turn to online businesses. Some, however, admitted that online businesses were new to them; but as they witnessed their fellow vendors moving into the online business, they too eventually switched to online. Some had always run their businesses via omnichannel marketing but with an emphasis on traditional sales, but as it happened, the online channel was then the only way to do business.

"The issue is . . . that I am not a techie. I am struggling to learn how to do online business, the digital side of it!" (Fried rice vendor)

"It is completely the opposite. My sales are 80% online, 20% offline" (Meatballs vendor)

Some vendors did manage their customers very well. Using a rudimentary database of contacts, they practiced some of the customer relationship management principles. They actively 'bombarded' their contacts with promotional offerings while at the same time sent the 'clear signal' that their business had now gone online. Some vendors aggressively promoted their businesses using celebrities who at that time worked *pro bono*, but others used various promotions offered by Uber-like local online transports.

"I broadcast promotional updates and relevant news to my WhatsApp contacts, so we can keep in touch, and follow it up individually if necessary" (Sticky rice vendor)

“During the COVID-19 pandemic, we can only afford to do free marketing/promotional activities. Luckily there are many celebgrams [celebrities of Instagram] who kindly endorsed our products . . . for free, thank goodness . . . ” (Dim sum vendor)

Along with the business change from physical to online, many vendors had to diversify by turning their products into ready-made frozen items. Some vendors pack their food products in a raw or half-cooked state so that customers can quickly cook them at home. Some entrusted their new products to the local supermarkets and promoted them through various social media channels. Some vendors creatively added variants to the main product, e.g., by adding colors and extras to the main product to boost sales.

“ . . . I pack half-cooked noodles into cups, then my customers cook them at home, the ingredients are already prepared for them” (Lomie noodles vendor)

“ . . . we add some dessert options to revitalize our menu” (Dim sum vendor)

All in all, the street vendors realized that they must think creatively to keep their businesses going; they did not expect large profits, only to the extent that they could cover the company’s operational costs.

“We aim to get through this difficult time . . . so we are actively promoting our products, not necessarily to boost sales, but simply to survive” (Martabak vendor)

4.3. Anticipating the Impacts of Any Future Pandemic

The safety and well-being of its workforce are the priorities of any organization during a pandemic. Along with the safety measures being put in place, the culinary tourism industry should continue thinking of, and equipping itself with, considerable skills and capabilities to ensure business resilience, should a pandemic recur in the future.

In order to better anticipate future unpredictable events, some vendors have equipped themselves with business resilience and survival skills. Moving to an online business model was an obvious option taken by many vendors during the restricted movements, but they did this not because they wanted to expand their business but rather to survive. Some vendors had to come out of their comfort zones to catch up with digital technology in committing to it. They also tried out things they would otherwise have never considered before the pandemic, such as partnerships with local shops and supermarkets allowing them to sell their products via consignment. Being resilient has given their businesses an upper hand to survive the economic downturn.

“ . . . at that time, it [online business] did not work out, but I was not savvy with the digital technology . . . but it is urgent now, whether I like it or not, I had no option but to learn how to do it [online business]” (Fried rice vendor)

“We have some savings . . . a small reserve to use during the ‘dry season’ as a means of survival . . . ” (Chocolate drinks vendor)

Agility and flexibility were reported to be key to adaptability, especially in navigating the wave of mobility restrictions and social distancing during the pandemic. Some street food vendors had demonstrated this capability by decisively switching from traditional face-to-face selling to online selling. Their cooperation with an online transportation provider also proved effective in opening up a new market by combining the offers from businesses, culinary and delivery services.

“ . . . we are hitch-hiking [taking the benefits of] grab and go food [local Uber-like delivery services] . . . they give away a lot of promotional offers to their customers, and as we are their associate, we need to ensure our martabak is always available” (Martabak vendor)

Another way to anticipate the impacts of a pandemic is by continuously adjusting the company’s strategies to what the market wants, and for this reason, some food vendors opened up various opportunities. For instance, as the pandemic has resulted in reduced income, the food vendors have had no option but to sell their products at a lower price, and at the same time to use social media to learn the kind of products that are currently popular.

“Because people’s financial capability may also reduce, so we try to sell something as cheaply as possible . . . yes, we can still sell, but the price is low” (Korean food vendor)

“ . . . on social media, we have a huge chance to get information on something viral” (Cookies vendor)

To ensure that they can adapt to changes during the pandemic, some food vendors also initiated product reviews. This was done by surveying consumers and asking them to provide feedback on the products the vendors sold, while at the same time carrying out some research via the internet on what consumers want.

“Reviews of new products are done through interviews with customers to review products” (Cake and bakery vendor)

“I research what people want by asking customers and researching through the internet” (Red ginger drinks vendor)

The pandemic has taught an essential lesson to the culinary tourism industry in Bandung, i.e., to be more forethoughtful. Vendors applied various anticipatory steps when they saw things starting to look out of control. The majority of the vendors devised contingency plans, for example, whether or not they should diversify offerings, i.e., the shape or form of their products, and looked at the driving forces behind the changes, i.e., competency-driven or market-driven.

“We had prepared our online offering long before the pandemic . . . we did this in anticipation of the changes in our customers’ buying behavior. So the pandemic went our way [benefitted us] . . . ” (Churros vendor)

Product diversification also comes in the form of new product development, such as looking at ongoing trends through observing the surroundings, surfing the internet, brainstorming that leads to the owner’s original ideas, or even those from their children, and attending webinars and courses. They did all this to obtain some new product development ideas.

“I observe what product is trending. Then, I try making them in small quantities before producing them for sale” (Home-made food vendor)

“Product ideas can come to us. We also change the packaging. When it does not look fresh, we will change it.” (Tapioca starch vendor)

However, some vendors not only focus on selling a product, but continuously develop new products and explore what other varieties of product can be made via various methods, be they formal cooking courses or trial and error.

“Well, after a while, you get bored with the cakes with raisins, so I added cheese and other toppings. I got these ideas from YouTube” (Yoghurt drinks vendor).

“Yes, most of the products that I sell are the results from taking a cookery course, but then I modified them” (Cake and bakery vendor).

5. Discussion

In this section, we will discuss how the findings of this research are elaborated from the point of view of the dynamic capabilities (DCs) theory. DCs are a company’s ability to reconfigure its resources to respond to changes that occur in the environment. With the prolonged COVID-19 pandemic, surrounded by many uncertainties, DCs have an important role in maintaining business sustainability [36].

Our findings indicate that street food vendors are highly capable of learning new methods of producing/serving food, by fitting the customer’s definition of needs according to changes in the business environment. These capabilities can create values for stakeholders through the implementation of a business strategy that focuses on sustainable business performance [37]. Continuous performance can demonstrate the organization’s

social legitimacy and customer's loyalty, which in turn will increase the market's value of the company and contribute to cost reductions [38–40].

The food street vendors are mostly family businesses so the capabilities embedded within them are not only intended to satisfy economic sustainability, but also social and environmental sustainability [41], which have now become the focus of those businesses. Many families often prefer to continue their family businesses rather than look for short-term profits. Furthermore, family businesses tend to have higher social values, e.g., social responsibilities, fairness, respect and trust [42,43], and as such, they also tend to maintain strong employees' relationships and pay attention to environment conservation [44,45].

5.1. Sensing Capability

Despite the negative impacts of the pandemic, street food vendors have been keen to see various emerging opportunities. By learning their target markets, the vendors strove to take advantage of these opportunities. This is aligned with Solek-Borowska [46] who argues that micro- and small-sized enterprises tend to be vigilant in sensing business opportunities. This is enabled by their willingness to directly engage their target markets in a face-to-face communication.

New opportunities have also been obtained by those who sold food to people who underwent self-isolation. This opportunity is put to good use, considering the limited mobility of a person affected by the coronavirus. Health drinks are also an alternative for new business opportunities considering that people are now more aware of healthy living and of the need to choose healthy foods and drinks.

In addition, vendors demonstrated their sensing capabilities by, for instance, conducting new, innovative product development, such as looking at ongoing trends through observing the internet and brainstorming with other netizens, leading to a significant improvement in the owner's original ideas, or even those from their children, and attending webinars and courses. This is in line with the research of Ardyan [47] stating that innovation arises as a result of the ability to sense the market, and anticipate changes in the business environment [48], processes and knowledge management [49].

They do all of this to gain new product development ideas. However, some focus not only on selling one product, but explore what products can be made and develop new products by adding different toppings. There is also trial and error.

A number of vendors consider that developing new products is a hassle, related to the lack of human resources. Sometimes good ideas cannot be implemented because of insufficient human resources. Other vendors ask customers for their opinions directly to make sure that the new product they develop is what the customer wants. Nevertheless, some vendors have done it by conducting tests on their closest family and employees; if they like the product, the assumption is that customers will like it too.

5.2. Learning Capability

Concerning the search for information and knowledge, many of the vendors have done it regularly by continuously expanding their network, using trial and error, and adapting to existing products until they find a suitable composition. In addition, some do it by routine searches through social media. Because of that, they believe that being active on social media is very important. Taking courses is also an option to seek new information and knowledge. Vendors believe that learning from experts will allow them to add to their knowledge more effectively. These findings seem consistent with that of Puthusserry et al. [50] who revealed that micro- and small-sized enterprises indeed used various internal and external knowledge sources such as networks of colleagues, industry associations, independent learning, trial and error efforts, and experience to increase product knowledge, markets and technologies. These sources of knowledge have subsequently offered various forms of valuable learning for accelerating their growth [51]. In particular, the ability to collaborate with professional networks will have a significant

impact on increasing the innovation ability and competitiveness of micro- and small-sized enterprises [52].

Some argue that particular skills and knowledge do not have to be possessed by everyone. It can all be taught while practicing, or what is known as ‘learning by doing’. The most important thing is their motivation to work. Learning by doing in micro- and small-sized enterprises exhibited several advantages, such as time and costs saving, adherence to the work standards, relatively easy to follow and efficient [53].

Most assume that new information can quickly turn into new knowledge. Some argue that the accessible features of social media allow them to learn quickly and efficiently, thereby gaining new knowledge. Some think that the new information is easy to convert into new knowledge because it follows their interests and educational background, and it can even be shared with other community members who have the same interests. Social media also enable their users to share, discover and create new ideas, with others [54], and in the context of marketing, are proven effective to promote the products by internalizing the knowledge owned by the promoters [55].

Employee experience is also a factor supporting the ease with which information can be converted into knowledge. Having experience in the field for decades will undoubtedly make it easier for new information to be converted into new knowledge. This is supported by the research of Kalmuk and Acar [56] arguing that organizations need to employ individuals who have the ability to acquire and differentiate new technology and information developments from the outside environment and must have the competence and talent to process information effectively while creating new knowledge more quickly.

Some argue that it takes time to turn new information into new knowledge. Everything is a process, and each stage takes time to share new information through the community. This is also supported by Oliveira et al. [57] who argue that it is not easy to change new information into new knowledge, considering that the failure factor in trying is still significant. Though this new knowledge is useful for new product development, some argue that the development of new products does not necessarily require special skills because culinary skills can be learned as we go along, as skills continue to develop.

Many consider that for micro- and small-sized enterprises, the work does not entirely follow their knowledge and skills. Those enterprises are more concerned with other things such as honesty and motivation, because they believe that knowledge and skills can be obtained along the way. Others believe that knowledge and skills are self-taught, so they cannot be obtained exclusively from formal channels. Today it is easier to find information on self-development, including increasing knowledge and skills.

5.3. Integrating Capability

In general, vendors engaged in the culinary field fall into the category of micro- and small-sized enterprises, which traditionally set-off from family businesses. Many of them started in this business by involving their family members. However, in general, there is a clear division of tasks between each individual involved in the business, even though the scope of the business is still small and only consists of a few people.

However, some vendors have a professionally formed team under their respective divisions of duties, although their business scale is still small. With a clear division of tasks, they understand their respective duties and responsibilities. Even for certain occupations such as cooking, the vendor does not want to give the job to others because it will change the taste. Even though they know their respective duties and responsibilities, sometimes they also consult with each other, for example, between production and marketing sections. Teece [58] refers to this as an organization’s ability to acknowledge the potential and capabilities of its members and then optimize and integrate these resources and capabilities can be assessed as strategic dynamic capabilities that are not easy to imitate.

It has been long acknowledged that business owners connect information, knowledge and all activities within the organization and from outside the organization through communities and resellers [59]. Some vendors involve external parties in the business, such as

collaborating with particular communities, especially for the supply of food/beverage ingredients. However, each party clearly understands its respective duties. Hervás-Oliver and Albors-Garrigós [60] believe that the capability to integrate enables micro- and small-sized enterprises to share tacit and uncodified knowledge so as to create sustainable competitive advantages. This can be supported by optimal use of IT systems and internet technologies to obtain maximum benefits from the integration process of owned resources [61]. This will allow micro- and small-sized enterprises to seamlessly expand their geographical coverage, which further helps them increase their strategic flexibility [62].

5.4. Coordinating Capability

The coordination function has been running quite well among food/beverage vendors, regardless of the size of their businesses. They already have a clear and reasonable division of tasks and coordination, which is also related to how they allocate resources appropriately to each individual. Some do it through meetings routinely held within a certain period, while others are done informally via telephone or video calls. The division of tasks carried out shows the existence of specialization and centralization which will ultimately encourage the creation of innovative practices found in the research of Gentile et al. [63], albeit there are many studies stating that there are overlapping roles in the work structure, and that micro- and small-sized enterprises rely on their owners [64].

The essence of coordination in the culinary business is through good communication between individuals. Even though minor errors still occur, this is used as feedback for evaluation. Coordination also happens when entrepreneurs depend on other parties in terms of supplying raw materials; sometimes, the raw material is dependent on the weather, so it cannot always match the demand. If demand is high, but suppliers cannot produce due to weather factors, then this will hamper production. For this reason, further training is needed for the sustainability of these raw materials.

Our findings are consistent with research of Boateng & Dzisi [65] who emphasized that communication and coordination between business owners and customers, resellers, and suppliers can help fix errors that occur so that repairs can be made as soon as possible. The coordinating capability is also important to maintain the quality of partnerships with relevant stakeholders, especially resellers and suppliers so that they can overcome limited resources, market changes and customer needs. Coordinating capability can also improve organizational agility to respond to uncertain business environments which ultimately determine organizational performance [66].

6. Concluding Remarks

The COVID-19 pandemic has taught the culinary tourism industry to unfold the impacts of prolonged restrictions. While on the one hand the widespread of the COVID-19 virus, to a large extent, has been successfully confined, the restrictions have seriously impacted the street vendors as the main actors in culinary tourism in Bandung. This study contributes to some thoughts on making the culinary business more resilient and sustainable in facing the recurring pandemic and the 'new normal' post-pandemic.

6.1. Theoretical Contributions

This research contributes to the enhancement of the dynamic capabilities theory, especially in the focused area of learning capabilities, where an entrepreneurial learning has become an important factor for micro- and small-sized businesses [67]. Entrepreneurial learning emphasizes how learning takes place at each stage of the business development. Though skills can be acquired progressively over a period of time, e.g., through learning by doing, how and when the learning process is pursued is indeed critical.

Our research has uncovered an interesting fact that in the context of micro- and small-sized businesses, trust is the most important thing when navigating their businesses, especially in the midst of an uncertain circumstances caused by the pandemic. Trust is often considered by the street food vendors to be more valuable than skills. They prefer to hire

employees who can be trusted over others with good skills but who cannot be trusted. The convenience and comfort in running the business are thus obtained from, among others, trusted employees. This is an extension of previous studies [42,43].

6.2. Implications for Practice

From the research findings, it can be seen that street food vendors have already had the means to study the changes in their business environments. This has been proven by how quickly they adapted to new situations, including the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the fact that the products being sold were food products, vendors survived by making some adjustments, either to the business model and/or the actual product.

Street food vendors are generally small businesses; many of them are categorized as informal sectors. Despite that, they in fact adapted quickly to the environmental conditions during the pandemic. There are several points that were considered by street food vendors and the culinary business in dealing with this pandemic. First, they stayed focused on the business being run, regardless of the various changes needed. As the pandemic impacted all sectors, even if they had switched to another type of business, it would not necessarily have been for the better. Second, the COVID-19 pandemic has compelled business activities including culinary businesses to shift toward digitalization. It is therefore critical for members of the culinary industry to improve their digital literacy. Third, street vendors seemed to have a contingency plan in anticipation of various changes; instead of reacting to an event, they anticipated it. Therefore, a contingency plan is useful when ideal solutions cannot be achieved.

6.3. Future Work

This study looks at how the prolonged COVID-19 pandemic can affect business sustainability in the culinary industry, especially for the street food vendors in Bandung. Despite the new insights, our study is limited in terms of the number of street vendor samples that we interviewed. This is mainly to do with the fact that the pandemic itself constrained our accessibility to those vendors. As our work has had to adhere to the local government's COVID-19 protocols, we have had no choice but to focus on collecting data post-pandemic. In the future, we therefore strive to improve the sample size by extending our study to other sectors that have similar characteristics to those of the culinary industry, for instance, the retail and service sectors. Further research can focus on marketing strategies, for instance, finding out if there is a difference in strategy between businesses pre- and post-pandemic. This is pertinent to the dynamic capabilities possessed by a business. Finally, a quantitative research approach may also be adopted to test the correlation amongst the key determinants as viewed from the perspective of consumers.

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Appendix A

Table A1. Examples of the interview questions.

No.	Guiding Questions
1.	How do you cope with the imposed restrictions due to the pandemic?
2.	How do restrictions affect your business? How do you obtain the raw materials?
3.	Did it occur to you to shift to other types of business?
4.	What are the impacts on your staff?
5.	How does your family cope with this?
6.	How does the pandemic affect your social life?
7.	What do you think about your business after the pandemic?
8.	What skills/knowledge/support do you need to cope with similar encounters in the future?
9.	Do you receive financial aid?
10.	What is your expectation of the government?
11.	How do you identify new business opportunities during the pandemic?
12.	Do you review the changes and their impact on customers?
13.	Do you do new product development? How do you develop new products and ensure that these new product developments are in line with customer requirements?
14.	Do you seek new information and knowledge on a regular basis? How do you turn new information into new knowledge?
15.	How do you use this new knowledge for new product development?
16.	Does each individual involved in the business contribute ideas and thoughts for business development?
17.	Does each individual understand their duties and responsibilities in accordance with their respective job descriptions?
18.	Does each individual do the work in accordance with the knowledge and skills possessed?
19.	How did you allocate resources (such as information, time, reports) to each individual?
20.	Has there been good coordination in running your business?

Table A2. Examples of codes and the emerging themes.

Primary Codes	Secondary Codes	Themes
Impacts on sales, raw materials availability, operational costs, labor costs, staff retention, staff bonuses, personal lives, households, social lives	Economic impacts, Social impacts	Impacts of social distancing and lock-down
Do nothing, switch to face mask production, move on to other places, switch to online business, better customer relationship management, product diversification.	Hang on to <i>status quo</i> , change of business, adopt various business strategies	How to overcome and mitigate impacts
Resilience, out of comfort zones, inept at digital technology, hitch-hiking with other online businesses, anticipatory steps, contingency plans, keeping in touch with customers	Business survival skills, adaptability, forethoughtfulness, customer intimacy	Building future capabilities
Government aid, financial aid, tax relief, decisive actions from the government	Government intervention, financial institutions' aid	Institution's roles

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