The Impact of COVID-19 on Ethnic Business Households Involved in Tourism in Ninh Thuan, Vietnam

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Abstract: Since the COVID-19 outbreak at the end of 2019, there have been many studies on its impact on the tourism industry. However, research on the effects of this pandemic on ethnic tourism business households is minimal. This study explores how COVID-19 has affected ethnic minority tourism businesses and how they have responded to the crisis. Two ancient craft villages of the Cham people, which are popular destinations in Ninh Thuan province, were selected as case studies. Data were collected from late 2021 to early 2022 through fieldwork and in-depth interviews with 20 subjects who ran Cham-owned business households. A mini-survey of 52 Cham-owned tourism business households was also conducted as a qualitative method to supplement the statistical data. The findings of this study are: the Cham tourism business households have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, but not significantly; and that the Cham business households have utilized their own advantages (such as a small business scale, utilization of available advantages, reasonable gender division of labor in the family, changing business strategies, and taking advantage of social media) to weather the crisis. This article contributes to the literature on the impact of disasters on tourism by focusing on how ethnic minorities use the business household model to overcome a crisis and by presenting evidence that ethnic tourism combined with business households is a sustainable model.

Keywords: business household; COVID-19 response; ethnic tourism; family business; resilience; sustainable tourism

1. Introduction

Tourism is considered a key economic sector in many countries, especially in developing countries [1–3]. However, history shows that economic, political, social, and epidemic crises (e.g., the 9/11 attacks, the 2008 financial crisis, the SARS outbreak in 2003, the Ebola outbreak in 2014, etc.) can all hurt the tourism industry as they introduce uncertainty, travel restrictions, and expenditure considerations, as well as affecting visitors' travel decisions and the destination's capacity to accommodate visitors [4–7]. In particular, studies have analyzed the relationship between infectious diseases and travel and how travel spreads these diseases [4,5,7,8].

Currently, the COVID-19 pandemic is a threat to the global tourism industry. Appearing from the end of 2019 and lasting until today, COVID-19 has virtually frozen the tourism industry. According to the World Tourism Organization report (UNWTO, 2021), international tourist arrivals in 2020 decreased by 74% compared to 2019, with a loss of 1 billion international tourist arrivals, a loss of USD 1.3 trillion in tourism exports, and an estimated loss in global GDP over USD 2 trillion, which put 100–120 million direct tourism jobs at risk and brought international tourism back to levels of the 1990s [9]. Tourism grew by 4% in 2021, but remains far below pre-pandemic levels [10].

In Vietnam, the tourism industry, with its total revenue accounting for nearly 10% of the country's GDP [11], has also been severely affected by the pandemic. Vietnam was most

affected by the pandemic in 2021, with the number of international visitors down 99.98% compared to 2019, domestic tourists down by 52.9%, and total receipts from tourists down 76.2%—equivalent to about USD 24 billion (Figure 1). This has dramatically impacted the jobs and lives of people involved in the supply chains of tourism products and services, especially ethnic minorities, who are considered vulnerable to economic shocks.
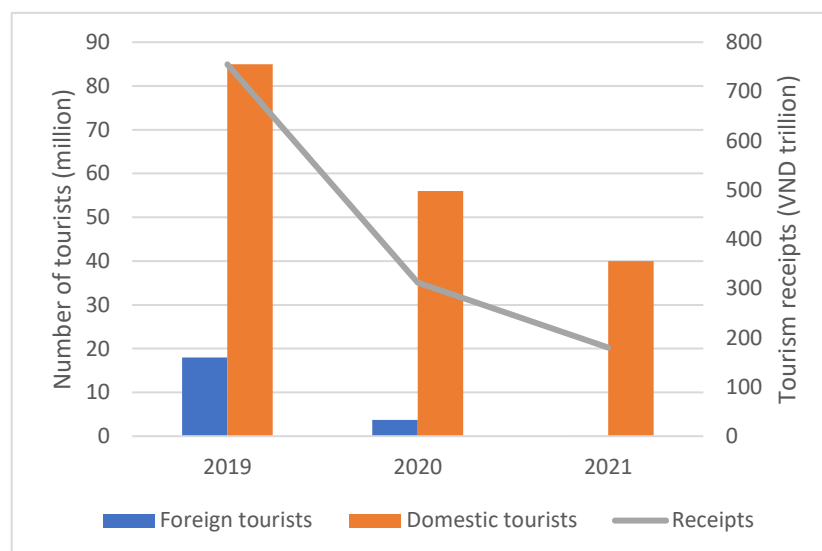
Figure 1. Number of tourists and tourist receipts in 2019–2021. Source: prepared by the author based on data from the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT), 2022.

Small family businesses dominate the travel industry worldwide [12–14]. They are the backbone of tourism [15,16]. Family-owned small businesses are considered an excellent model for coping with crises and have a high resilience after crises [17–19]. In a small-scale, closed, and family-oriented economy, the business household is a popular business model or form [20]. Business households have been essential to the growth of the national economy via tax duties [20], job creation, and worker payment improvements [21–23].

As of 2018, there were more than 5.1 million non-agricultural business households in Vietnam, with more than 8.78 million employees. The majority of sole business households are engaged in trade and services (82.13% of the total number of households), including 824,000 households (16%) involved in services, accommodation, and food [20]. Business households are crucial for tourism as they are the basis for destination competitiveness. From both an economic and community perspective, small family businesses have not only become economic drivers in many destinations, but have also shaped the representation of aspects of the culture [24]. If family businesses are not involved in the tourism industry, communities in rural areas will face out-migration, and the intention to standardize services will result in ignoring cultural patterns [25].

Ethnic tourism is also considered a sustainable tourism model [26]. Ethnicity is increasingly encouraged to attract tourists and develop income and foreign exchange for ethnic communities and the countries in which they live [27]. Many countries are taking advantage of their cultural diversity and using ethnic tourism to promote regional economic growth [28]. At the same time, this tourism has become a strong driver for strengthening the identity of ethnic groups, as it provides significant opportunities for the presentation of cultures and the revival of customs, languages, and cultural pride [29–31].

Despite the importance of household businesses to the global economy, they have not yet attracted the attention they deserve from academia [24]. There seems to be a significant lack of research on household businesses related to the tourism industry [32] and on the resilience of this business model. The relationship between business households and ethnicity is also an underexplored topic. Indigenous peoples offer an untapped

potential to help us shape solutions to the COVID-19 pandemic and similar threats in the future [33]. This study, therefore, aims to: (1) clarify the extent of the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on ethnic business households involved in tourism; (2) identify how ethnic business households have managed to weather the COVID-19 crisis; and (3) suggest some oriented solutions to deal with similar crises in the future with the goal of sustainable tourism development.

A literature review was conducted to understand business households, ethnicity in business, and business household resilience, thereby creating a theoretical basis and variables for the study. From this theoretical framework, guiding interview questions were prepared to collect information. A mini-survey was also performed to support the qualitative data. Two well-known destinations in Ninh Thuan province, Vietnam, the Bau Truc and My Nghiep craft villages of the Cham people, were selected as case studies. This study contributes to the research on the sustainable development of ethnic tourism and the resilience of ethnic business households to crises.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Business Households, Tourism, and Resilience

Depending on the level of development and tradition of each country, the economic activities of the household can be represented in the form of an enterprise or economic group, which is managed on the basis of family practice. The family's cultural tradition directly influences the organization and operation of economic models managed by the household [34]. Getz and Carlsen [25] argue that many families start their businesses to satisfy their needs and preferences rather than to maximize profits or grow the business. Therefore, many families often consider business a side job, taking advantage of the family's conditions to earn extra income. Household economic activities are also diverse, such as those that exploit locational advantages including houses on major roads and houses with frontage, or those that use the Internet [35] to run small businesses or build businesses by establishing business households and enterprises through modern business models [20].

Regarding the difference between small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and family businesses, Li and Hinch [24] point out some notable characteristics, such as greater risk aversion, reluctance to accept outside investors, attachment to family work, goals under the influence of family members, interdependence between family and business goals affecting the entrepreneurial process, usually owned and managed by married couples, lack of qualified personnel and financial resources, limited access to entrepreneurial expertise, and little informal management training (owner-managers). Other scholars argue that niche marketing possibilities, independence, pliability and adaptability, and continuity and solidity across generations are some advantages of home-based businesses in the tourism industry [36,37]. The flexibility of family businesses is also related to widespread marketing techniques [24], such as social media, which are used to increase brand awareness and reach out to new customer bases [38]. While accepting these ever-changing circumstances, business households can create new competitive advantages using their existing market knowledge, such as of valuable resources and rare, inimitable, and irreplaceable attributes [39].

The tourism industry offers many opportunities for family businesses [24]. Due to the fragmented essence of the tourism industry, family businesses play an essential role because of their flexibility, individuality, prestige, and capacity to exploit niches [40]. The advantages of the household business model give it natural resilience after crises and disasters.

From a strategic management perspective, resilience should be seen as an essential element or part of sustainable development [24]. Resilience associated with adaptive-transformational processes activated by sudden shocks requires new standards and emergent communication networks [41]. Moreover, businesses need to adapt to the new environment and move in a different direction rather than just repeating what happened in the past. Family businesses can often mitigate the consequences of crises and turn them into business

chances [42]. Family businesses can outperform non-family businesses in turbulent times, especially when multiple family members are involved as owners [43]. Entrepreneurs with good community relationships can use their reputations to build confidence, regard, and interactions. This promotes proactive behavior in the community on how to respond to crises [44].

Embedded family relationships, such as kinship, confidence, sacrifice, etc., can directly give a distinctive form to resilience and provide a competitive edge [45]. Inner social capital and intra-family ties reinforce the advantages of family ownership during crises and lead to a better performance than that of non-family firms [46,47]. The resilience of business households is tied to the available resources and the level of entrepreneurship [42,43]. Researchers have found that access to human, social, and financial resources positively impact the survival of family businesses [48,49]. Resources created via formal and informal networks among household members, non-family members, exterior relations, and exterior conditions strengthen the business' social capital, prestige, and position [50]. The connection between families, businesses, local communities, and the government system supports business households in coping with adversity [45].

2.2. Ethnicity, Family, and Business

Ethnic cultures and traditional skills are crucial elements for increasing the tourism attractiveness of ethnic regions and enhancing the sustainability of local household livelihoods [19].

Ethnic minorities often do not have many resources to open a business; thus, they must take advantage of what is available in the family to conduct business. Therefore, the household business model suits their capabilities and resources. Researchers have suggested that, through business ownership, ethnic groups can achieve economic and social progress [51–54]. Talking about ethnicity means talking about their culture. Culture creates a subtle lens through which ethnic entrepreneurs see the world, which is the essence of what drives them to act [49]. Family ownership of a business determines its commitment and financial strength. Businesses thrive when families are proud and confident in their ethnicity and culture [19]. Business households gain a competitive advantage through the regard, tolerance, forbearance, and passion of their family [19].

Danes et al. (2008) used types of capital to discuss the relationship between culture and entrepreneurship for ethnic family businesses [49]. He argues that social capital is central to most ethnic values and that it opens the way for businesses to access other types of capital and plays a prominent part in managing many ethnic family businesses. In managing ethnic businesses, Pierre Bourdieu preferred the "cultural capital" term rather than social capital [55]. Bourdieu sees cultural knowledge as capital because, ultimately, it is translated into a financial advantage for the ethnic owner. In essence, these behaviors are the fundamental means by which social capital is used for the benefit of the business.

Ethnic family businesses can combine indigenous (environmental management) and non-indigenous (Western technologies) approaches to environmental and business management [33]. Indigenous entrepreneurs integrate the values of indigenous culture and the mainstream culture (centered on global Western business culture) when managing their enterprises [56]. Ethnic entrepreneurs play a significant role in the development of tourism in regions where multinational and international firms may not enter the tourism market [57]. Thus, tourism entrepreneurs, especially in rural and ethnic communities, are push motivators for developing tourism and are responsible for sustainable tourism development. Their involvement in this sustainable tourism development leads to the more efficient use of natural resources in the region [58].

Ethnic family businesses have a competitive advantage in terms of human resources. The primary workforce is often family members who are willing to work long hours, often without pay [59–61]. Aside from spouses and children, most ethnic minority business owners employ workers of the same ethnicity with long hours and low wages, similar to apprenticeships [62,63].

Tretiakov et al. (2020, p. 1) commented, "Family is the source of Indigenous culture" [56]. Family seems to be more important in ethnic family businesses than in other businesses because of the collective orientation that characterizes cultures other than European and American cultures [56,64]. The organization of family economic activities is strongly inspired by culture and family practices, and this knowledge is often inherited and evolved [65]. Danes et al. (2008) argue that ignoring ethnic and family contexts creates the culture from which entrepreneurship is created, creating a one-sided view of ethnic businesses [49]. He argues that many people underestimate the vital function of the family in developing values, beliefs, norms, and practices, especially when starting a business [49].

3. Methodology

Two of the researchers were local, with sufficient time for participant observation and "immersion" [66] in the community. However, the idea of this study only appeared in mid-2021 after the COVID-19 pandemic spread widely and began to affect tourism in Ninh Thuan province. Data collection was conducted in the first five months of 2022 using various methods, including interviews, surveys, observations, and secondary data.

In-depth interviews were conducted in the field from November 2021 to January 2022. Twenty household business owners in the Bau Truc and My Nghiep villages were selected by purposive sampling. Interviewees were selected according to the following criteria: (1) they are Cham people; (2) they have a business in tourism services; and (3) they have been operating for at least five years and are still in operation. Interviews used a series of semistructured questions about the sociocultural influence of COVID-19 to elicit perceptions and responses of those affected by the situation. After interviewing 20 respondents, the information becomes saturated [67,68]. Most interviews were conducted in the Cham language, although some were in Vietnamese.

In addition, we also conducted a mini-survey in February 2022 to supplement the information for this qualitative study. A questionnaire designed with 10 questions was distributed to all 52 business households in the two study villages, which included close- and open-ended questions. The questions involved business households' basic information such as type of travel services, jobs other than their tourism business, income before and during the pandemic, business strategy, and business owners' perceptions about the pandemic's impact. In total, 100% of the questionnaires were collected (Table 1).

Table 1. Number of respondents.

Method	Respondent	n/N	%N	Site
Interview	Tourism business households	20/52	38%	-My Nghiep (9) -Bau Truc (11)
Questionnaire survey		52/52	100%	-My Nghiep (22) -Bau Truc (30)

The onsite activities and behaviors of residents, tourism business households, craft makers, and ethnic performers were observed and recorded. We expended time in two minority communities to gain insight into their culture and lives through participation and observation. Tourism strategies, authorized documents, newspapers, and journal papers were studied to determine problems in ethnic tourism and to comprehend the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the minority people in Ninh Thuan.

Both quantitative and qualitative analytical methods were employed to analyze and interpret the data. Each item of qualitative data was classified and interpreted according to the above themes and dimensions. Data analysis followed a category-centered approach that parallels the grounded theory in searching for themes [69]. The interviews were transcribed, and the central themes were specified by coding the interview material. Quantitative data were coded and analyzed using SPSS statistical software. A statistical method using only frequencies was used to analyze survey data.

4. About the Site

Ninh Thuan is a poor province located in South Central Vietnam. In 2018, its GRDP reached VND 24,288 billion (equivalent to USD 1.0549 billion), ranking 57 out of 63 provinces. According to the report of the Ninh Thuan Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism (2021), the tourism industry in the period of 2016–2020 contributed 8% to the province's GRDP. However, since the beginning of 2020, the number of tourists has decreased sharply due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. From the beginning of May to the end of October 2021, due to the complicated situation of the COVID-19 epidemic, the province had a policy that temporarily suspended the welcome of tourists at accommodation establishments and tourist attractions. This situation greatly affected the province's tourism activities in 2021, causing the total arrivals to decrease by 51.5% compared to 2019 (Figure 2).
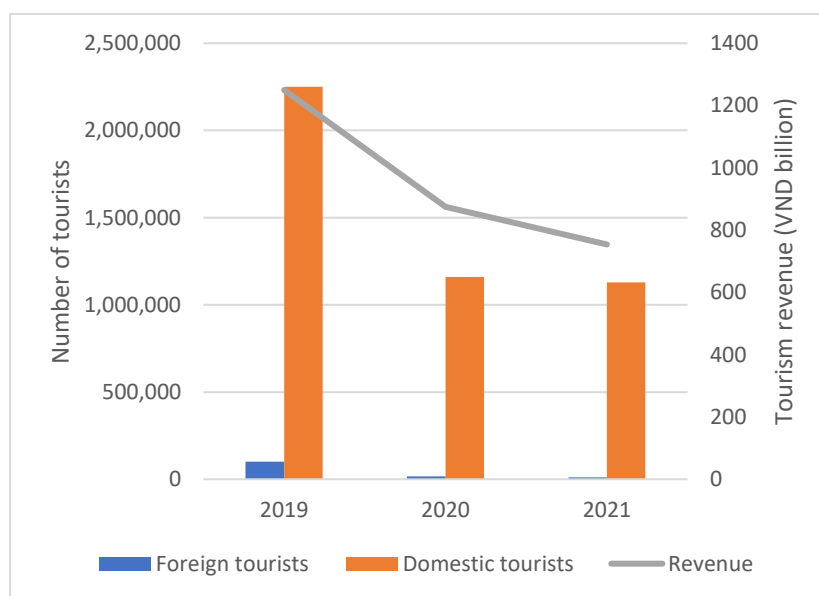
Figure 2. Number of tourists and tourism revenue in Ninh Thuan in 2019–2021. Source: prepared by the author based on data from the annual report of Ninh Thuan Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism.

Ninh Thuan is a long-standing home for the indigenous Cham people. In the past, the Cham people were the rulers of the Champa kingdom, which had a brilliant civilization. Although the Cham of today is one of 53 ethnic minorities in Vietnam, they inherited a massive, rich, and diverse culture from their ancestors. There are temples, festivals, cuisine, music, traditional crafts, customs, and literature, which are all abundant resources for tourism development. Cham culture is considered to be different, which is an advantage to attract tourists to visit Ninh Thuan province. Ninh Thuan has four special national monuments, all of which are Cham cultural heritages: two tangible cultural heritages (Po Klong Garai tower and Hoa Lai tower) and two intangible cultural heritages (the Kate Festival and traditional pottery art of the Cham people from the Bau Truc village).

The government recognized Bau Truc and My Nghiep as craft villages in 2007. Both are located in Phuoc Dan town (Ninh Phuoc district), which is convenient for tourists. Bau Truc and My Nghiep are areas where the indigenous Cham people have long lived and where many unique traditional cultural features of the Cham people are preserved. Bau Truc is famous for its pottery making. The village has 731 households with 3665 Cham people. Through comparisons of materials, the art of shaping, firing techniques, and types of ceramic products, scientists believe that today's Cham pottery, especially from Bau Truc, is the oldest surviving type of pottery in Southeast Asia [70]. Since 2000, Vietnam's economy has developed, and the tourist market has expanded, causing Bau Truc village to become a tourist destination. Since then, to cater to the market and shopping tastes

of tourists, the Cham people began to change their ceramic designs, creating household ceramics and fine art such as flowerpots, ceramic lamps, feng shui pots, large ceramic vases, miniature Cham towers, and all kinds of Cham statues, from human figures to idols. As claimed by scientific inventory data collected in October 2018, about 28% of Cham households still make pottery, with nearly 300 potters and artisans practicing handmade pottery [71]. According to the village chief and our survey, Bau Truc has 30 home-based ceramic businesses.

The report of data from the People's Committee of Phuoc Dan town shows that My Nghiep has 700 households with 3665 Cham people. Most people still sew and weave daily for living or trading. Brocade weaving is a traditional profession of the Cham people, as this profession is found in most Cham villages, but the most concentrated and large-scale production is located in My Nghiep village. In the past, the Cham people weaved brocade mainly for daily life and rituals. They will exchange products with the Raglai, Churu, and Rade people in the central highlands if there is a surplus. To expand the customer base and serve tourism, the villagers create many products such as fashion dresses, scarves, bags, wallets, backpacks, hats, carpets, tablecloths, dolls, etc. According to our survey, 22 households in the village participate in a tourism business related to brocade products.

Currently, tourism products in the two villages include handicraft products, traditional cuisine and music, homestays, participation in pottery or weaving, festival experiences, and ecotourism. However, more than 90% of visitors come to the village mainly to buy handicrafts. In addition, the products of the two craft villages are supplied to resorts, galleries, and businesses selling cultural products across the country. As Mayuzumi (2022) pointed out: "the purchase of souvenirs is an opportunity to experience different cultures, and through this act, tourists can form a space for cross-cultural and social negotiation" [72].

5. Findings

Due to the matriarchal social structure of the Cham people, most of the subjects of this study are women. They are both business and household owners. In these two craft villages, women are in charge of pottery making or weaving, whereas men play an auxiliary role in collecting materials, transporting goods, or participating in the creation of statues and bas-relief if gifted. The collected data shows that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a negligible impact on the Cham tourism business households. The Cham business households have advantages for overcoming the crisis, such as a small business scale, taking advantage of available resources, rationally dividing family labor by gender, changing business strategies, and taking advantage of social networks.

5.1. The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Cham Tourism Business Households Is Negligible

Although the COVID-19 pandemic appeared in Vietnam at the end of January 2020, it was only from May to October 2021 that the pandemic severely affected Ninh Thuan province. On the one hand, the implementation of social distancing and tourism closures have made the business situation in the two craft villages difficult. They did not welcome any tourist groups to visit, sell, or deliver traditional handicrafts to customers. According to the report of the Ninh Phuoc District People's Committee, the district welcomed 454,000 visitors to visit places such as the Bau Truc pottery village, My Nghiep weaving village, and other destinations in 2019. In 2021, the number of visitors decreased by 89.5% to 47,720.

The decrease in the number of visitors led to a reduction in revenue from tourism activities. Our survey shows that the average annual revenue of tourism business households decreased by about 53% during the COVID-19 period (in 2020 and 2021) (Table 2).

Table 2. Average annual revenue of the Cham tourism business households before and during the COVID-19 pandemic (VND).

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre-COVID-19	52	30,000,000	2,100,000,000	540,240,000.00	648,300,338.562
During COVID-19	52	0	1,200,000,000	255,700,000.00	400,910,507.088
Valid N (listwise)	52				

When income was reduced, the family living expenses were paid with money accumulated before the epidemic or from the income of other family members.

"My family can't sell pottery, so there's no income; All living expenses in the family depend on the salary of my two sisters". (Informant 08)

However, almost all business households are small-scale, self-employ their family, and take advantage of the housing space as a business base, especially for tax exemptions. Therefore, despite the crisis, most household businesses still operated in moderation. Only 14% of business households temporarily stopped operating (Figure 3).
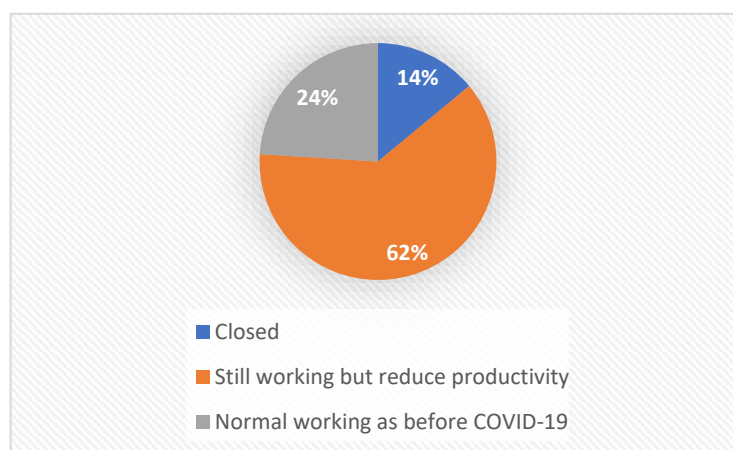
Figure 3. Status of your business during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The survey also shows that 100% of business households will return to work when the pandemic ends, showing that the long-term impact of the pandemic is negligible on Cham tourism business households. Due to the nature of handicraft products that are not worn out if not sold now, the product is still there and can be used for trading in the following year.

"When we can't sell goods, my family just doesn't have extra income, but the products of jars, pots, bags, cloths, backpacks are still there, preserved intact in the stall, waiting for the epidemic to end and then sell." (Informant 04)

On the other hand, the tourism business is just one of the livelihoods of rural people. Up to 72% of household businesses have sources of income other than tourism, which most cultivate on their agricultural land (Figure 4). This explains how business households' income decreased by about half during the COVID-19 pandemic despite the number of arrivals decreasing by nearly 90%.
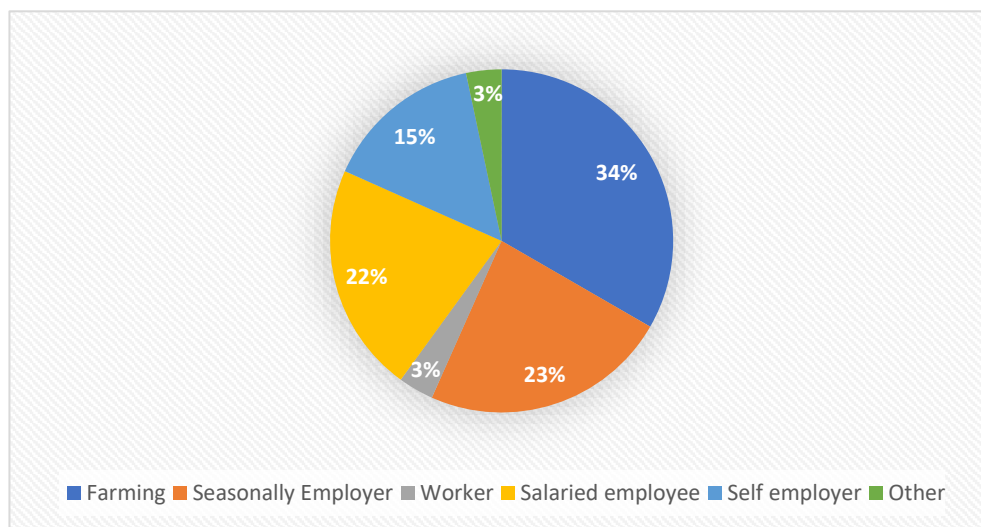
Figure 4. Sources of income outside tourism.

> "Here people are still mainly farming. Doing tourism to earn extra income. Because my family has been making pottery for a long time, I use the products at home to sell to tourists. Without visitors, income is less, but people's lives are still going on as usual. Without guests, we still work in the fields and raise livestock." (Informant 01)

5.2. Take Advantage of Availability

Most of the tourism business households in these two craft villages are able to cope well in the face of the COVID-19 crisis because of the availability of rich resources and support from their communities. Raw materials for production, such as clay, sand, firewood, and straw used to produce ceramics, or colored threads and looms for brocade production, are exploited by the Cham themselves or made from locally available materials. Due to production practices, most local business households have ready-made materials that are enough to last for three months. Therefore, the production progress of ceramic and textile products of business households is not hindered when going out of the house is restricted.

> "After each rice harvest, we rent a plow or an ox cart to carry clay for 300,000 to 500,000 VND to go home and store it for 3 months. Only pay for transportation, clay does not need to be bought, just go to the field near the river Quao to exploit. This kind of clay is only available in this village." (Informant 04)

> "When we go to the market, we buy dozens of rolls of thread in different colors and bring them back to weave for a long time." (Informant 09)

The labor force working for household businesses usually consists of acquaintances in the village or family members. Therefore, although the number of working days is smaller and the income is reduced, they ask for nothing more from the employer.

> "My family's business takes advantage of the labor of family or relatives, or longtime weavers who accept late wages" (Informant 05)

Traditional houses of the Cham people all have a yard to dry agricultural products or perform some rituals at home. Today, they utilize the courtyard to make and display ceramic and textile products to introduce them to visitors.

> "We use the yard in front of the house to make a base for ceramic production and business, so we don't have to pay any rent for the space." (Informant 10)

5.3. Changing Business Strategies

Before the impact of the crisis, the Cham tourism business households quickly changed their operating strategies. The survey shows that the majority of households chose to reduce their operating capacity (production and sales) and reduce the number of employees (Figure 5).
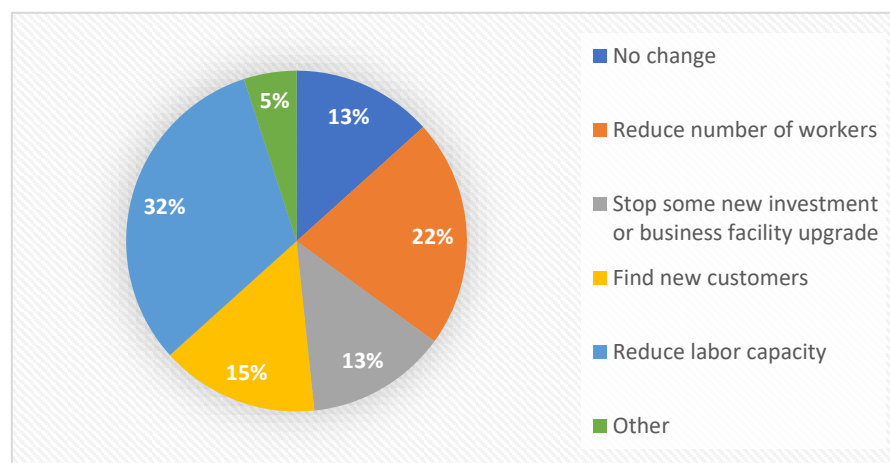
Figure 5. How business strategies changed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

> "During this pandemic, I did not receive a single tourist. Products are sold very few, so I don't hire employees anymore, but I and my family do it ourselves." (Informant 13)

Some business households have changed their target customers, going from selling directly to tourists to selling online, finding customers, and promoting products on social networking sites such as Facebook and Zalo (Vietnam's social network).

> "Since the day of the epidemic, no tourists have come to visit or come to my house to buy ceramics. That's why I took photos and videos of my home ceramic designs and posted them on my personal Facebook or Zalo to sell individually or in combos. When the order is closed, I will deliver the goods to the customer by bus or by post and receive the transfer via bank account." (Informant 12)

5.4. The Role of the Matriarchal Society of the Cham People

The Cham matriarchal society gives women the same position and role as men, or one that is even slightly better. It clearly divides the obligations of men and women based on gender identity. Women take care of domestic affairs, and men care for social affairs. Women manage family finances, raise children, and inherit ancestral heritage, whereas men are given priority to study, go out to work, have diplomatic relations, and seek status in society. Therefore, in the Cham household business model, 96% (50/52) of businesses are managed by women.

Women are also artisans who make ceramic and textile products. For the traditional professions of the Cham people, the family's skills and know-how are directly imparted to the daughter by her mother. They are responsible for production, finding customers, selling products, managing finances, and paying for all household and business expenses. Men are less involved in this business. They have other jobs, including as farmers, hired labor, and salaried workers. Besides their work, they must always be ready to help with domestic business, which often requires men's strength.

> "My mother makes ceramic products like vases, flower pots, animals, and so on. My father and brother worked as hired laborers. When there was no work, they helped my mother with heavy work such as digging clay, carrying sand,

collecting firewood, and straw, firing pottery, packing and delivering goods. I help my mother look after the store and sell the goods" (Informant 06)

The rational division of labor in the family and gender equality in the Cham matriarchal society has helped bring into full play the full potential of family members. Everyone contributes their efforts according to their ability.

6. Discussion

Qualities such as independence, pliability and adaptability, continuity and solidity over generations [36,37], valuable resources, and rare, inimitable, and irreplaceable attributes [39] are the advantages that have helped the Cham's ethnic entrepreneurial households involved in tourism withstand the COVID-19 pandemic with minimal damage. The diversity of livelihoods is also an advantage for them, and when the tourist season is over, they return to farm work. This is also what Anna Carr [33] realized when researching the Māori people in New Zealand. As tourism activities in the Māori region ceased during the COVID-19 pandemic, some alternative economic and social activities have arisen.

Getz and Carlsen (2005) argue that many family businesses are created to satisfy the necessities and preferences of the owners and their homes rather than to maximize profits or business growth [25]. Hence, many families often consider business as just a side job, taking advantage of the family's existing conditions to earn extra income. Consequently, they rarely invest a lot of time and money in the business, and thus, the loss to the business when the market is in crisis is less severe than that of a non-family business. This result implies that developers must be cautious when formulating plans for tourism development in rural areas. Plans should not wholly change local people's livelihoods to focus only on tourism. If possible, it is best to build tourism on the existing livelihoods of local people.

Anna Carr (2020) made a good point when she said: "Indigenous communities and peoples provide a magnified example of the negative impact of COVID-19 on humanity." [33] (pp. 494–495). The extent of the vulnerability to the impact of the pandemic is also moderated by the level of available resource use of each tourism service provider. Research shows that the Cham people mainly provide ready-made products (products they produced daily before they were used for tourism). They take advantage of their family's facilities and houses to display their products, in combination with providing accommodation and food services that use family labor as the primary source. When the number of visitors declines, they lose their income but can still maintain or restore the service if needed because the cost to maintain the service is almost minimal. This result shows similarities with the results of Quang et al. (2021), who studied the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Hmong and Dao ethnic groups in Sapa, Vietnam [73].

Therefore, the extent of the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on different types of businesses depends on the type of business product, the target customer, and the self-use of available resources. As the case of the Cham people of Ninh Thuan province shows, livelihood models based on internal resources can cope with and recover from economic shocks well. Thus, the orientation to restore and develop tourism in ethnic minority groups should be based on assessing and identifying the local potentials and strengths in the spirit of making the most of its local resources.

Ethnic business households often take advantage of available resources to start a business, but rarely invest in a completely new business. This feature dramatically reduces the loss that an ethnic business household can face compared to other types of businesses. In particular, this type of business has a competitive advantage regarding human resources. Due to blood and economic ties, family members are willing to work long hours, often without pay [59–61]. In addition, ethnic minority business owners often employ people of the same ethnicity with long hours and low wages, similar to apprenticeships [62,63].

Another tool that Cham small family businesses have used to cope with the crisis is the Internet. According to Khanal et al. (2015), small farm businesses benefit from Internet access because it increases business income and off-farm income, and reduces some input costs and household expenses [35]. Anna Carr (2020) believes that ethnic family businesses

have the advantage that they can combine both local and Western models for sustainable development [33]. Specifically, these businesses have both indigenous environmental management skills and Western technologies to promote their business, of which the use of the Internet for online marketing is one of them. There is also a correlation between the flexibility of family businesses and widespread marketing techniques [24], such as social media, which are used to increase brand awareness and reach out to new customer bases [38]. However, the Internet and other digital means are still less common among ethnic minorities and remote areas in Vietnam. Digital conversion is changing business standards, and home businesses must adapt to new technologies and ever-changing markets. To develop appropriate policies, tourism managers in rural and remote areas should pay greater attention to this point.

Another factor that plays a large role in managing and running an ethnic family business is culture. Danes et al. (2008) used types of capital to discuss the relationship between culture and entrepreneurship for ethnic family businesses [49]. He calls it "social capital". Pierre Bourdieu directly calls it "cultural capital" [55] because, according to him, cultural knowledge is ultimately translated into the financial advantage of the ethnic owner. In the case of the Cham, cultural factors such as traditional know-how, production practices, matriarchal families, and village culture have all contributed to helping businesses overcome the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, the role of matriarchal social organizations has given Cham women leadership and gender equality, resulting in deeper trust and the stability of the business [19].

7. Conclusions

This qualitative study indicates that although the COVID-19 pandemic has hurt ethnic tourism business households, causing them to lose income and adjust their livelihoods, this model also shows resilience to economic shocks. The tourism business model of the ethnic people can recover by utilizing the available advantages of nature, human resources, culture, production practices, and information technology simultaneously. It is especially suitable for ethnic minorities in rural areas because it does not require the tourism business to be their main livelihood. It also neither requires a large number of visitors nor the development of mass tourism. This model helps ethnic minorities in rural areas take advantage of existing conditions to earn additional income, as well as to introduce their ethnic culture to the world. These characteristics make this type of business sustainable, and these can be essential suggestions for furthering sustainable development in disadvantaged areas.

This paper references the impact of crises on tourism, specifically the impact of natural disasters on ethnic tourism businesses. The investigation proves the sustainable development of the business household model when combined with ethnic tourism. However, to have a more objective and accurate assessment of this issue, future studies on the impact of crises on tourism business households of the majority, on other business models of ethnic minorities, or on male-owned ethnic tourism business households are necessary. In addition, we recommend expanding the theoretical framework of the topic to include thoughtful heritage marketing as an important factor in strengthening the brand of small businesses, ultimately providing a shield against the unfavorable effects of unexpected negative events. From a methodological point of view, the use of DEA and its decomposition models to evaluate intellectual capital in regions is recommended.

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