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TRANSFORMATIONS IN UNCERTAIN TIMES: FUTURE PERFECT IN TOURISM, HOSPITALITY AND EVENTS

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Small-Scale Restaurants Resilience In The Time Of Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Pandemic

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Abstract

In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Libyan restaurant sector is struggling to survive. Resilience is crucial for small scale restaurants to be able to respond to this pandemic. Due to the resilience concept remains sparsely researched in the tourism field, we seek to address a question of how resilient are small-scale restaurants likely to be in the face of the COVID-19 Pandemic? We used template analysis to reveal processes of creating new ways of working during the COVID-19 Pandemic. We interviewed owners and workers of small-scale restaurants in Tobruk City, Libya to explore the ways in which their stories expressed different measures for organisational resilience during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The findings showed that organisational resilience is embedded in three components: acquisition, awareness and adaptation (the 3As). These components are lenses through which researchers see personal efforts of small-scale restaurants' owners to build resilient responses.

Keywords: small-sized restaurants, resilience, COVID-19, Libyan crisis

[WP]

Introduction

With no vaccine and limited medical capacity to treat the disease, the COVID-19 Pandemic poses a serious challenge to restaurant businesses (Gössling, Scott, & Hall, 2020). According to some experts, "the restaurant industry, more than any other industry in the nation, has suffered the most significant sales and job losses since the COVID-19 outbreak began" (Guszkowski, 2020). Survey indicated that two-thirds of all restaurant employees have lost their jobs: over eight million furloughs and layoffs in total. The survey also expects that the restaurant industry will face \$240 billion in losses by the end of the 2020 (NRA, 2020). In Libya, the situation is profoundly complex, restaurant businesses are an industry heavily hit by the ongoing deteriorating security situation (Mansour, Holmes, Butler, & Ananthram, 2019). Therefore, we are not talking about one (coronavirus) crisis, but of crises in plural—the multifaceted crisis situation (unrest). When the first case of the coronavirus disease was revealed on March 25, 2020, about 67% of all restaurants in the capital Tripoli are closed. Municipal Council of Tobruk ordered on March 27, 2020 that all restaurants close and Stay Home order was implemented. On June 2020, the order of re-opening of restaurants were issued. By October 2020 the Covid-19 cases in Tobruk city were increasing reaching at 222 cases.

This paper aims to address a question of how resilient are small-scale restaurants likely to be in the face of the COVID-19 Pandemic? We draw on organisational resilience to answer this question. Organisational resilience literature covers three main streams (Ruiz-Martin, López-Paredes, & Wainer, 2018): (1) resilience as a feature of an organisation (i.e., what an organisation has), (2) resilience as an outcome of the organisation's activities (i.e., what an organisation does); and (3) resilience as a measure of the disturbances that an organisation can tolerate. This paper is the type of the third stream, naming what restaurants did during the COVID-19 pandemic? Research into organisational resilience has a long history; however, there are relatively few studies in the area of tourism and hospitality industries. For example, Brown, Rovins, Feldmann-Jensen, Orchiston, and Johnston (2017) concluded that the key factor of hotel resilience include building adaptive capacity, creating flexibility and fostering an organisational culture that promotes self-efficacy, innovation and questions the status quo. Recently, Alonso et al. (2020) studied 45 small

hospitality businesses during the COVID-19 outbreak. they found there are two successful factors of building resilience. The first is the ways of coping dimensions including self-reliant, vigilant and inoperative. The second factor is the changing-adjusting dimensions in work-based adjustment, adjustment to compliance and fringe-detachment. In the SMEs context, several studies have shown that SMEs are more resilient than others during crises, for example, acute economic crises (Pal, Torstensson, & Mattila, 2014). It is observed that SMEs have specific characteristics that enable them to survive crises (Alonso et al., 2020; Eggers, 2020). Thus, it has been argued that hospitality firms may show some resilient characteristics during the COVID-19 pandemic (Alonso et al., 2020). Indeed, little is known about resilience during COVID-19 pandemic and it is not clear what factors leading to making small enterprises more resilient. This claim is supported by Prayag, Spector, Orchiston, and Chowdhury (2019), who concluded that the resilience concept remains sparsely researched in the tourism field.

Method

This study is conducted within the interpretivist paradigm because the emphasis is on exploring the meaning of the experiences and responses of small-scale restaurants with regard to the COVID-19 Pandemic from restaurant-owners' points of view (Casey, 2006). A case study design is used because the COVID-19 event is a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context (Yin, 2017). A multiple case study was selected because single case studies are vulnerable and limit the researcher's observations (Yin, 2017). Four restaurants were chosen (see table 1) and this number provides a robust picture of how small-scale restaurants are doing during the COVID-19 pandemic (Perry, 1998). seven semi-structured interviews were conducted between July and September in 2020 with restaurant owners and workers living in Tobruk City, Libya. Because of personal safety, the researchers conducted the interviews via Facebook video chat lasting between 15–20 min.

Table 5. Case study profile

Restaurant name	Number of employees	Type of activity	Number of interviews
A	3	Fast food	1
B	11	Sea food	3
C	9	Pizza	2
D	8	Roast chicken	1

The interviews were transcribed and analysed using template analysis (Brooks, McCluskey, Turley, & King, 2015). The template analysis began by producing an initial template derived from the organisational resilience literature (see table 2) and interview questions.

Table 6. The initial template of resilience codes based on existing literature and interview questions

Priori resilience codes
1. Gathering information 1.1.1. Communication channels 1.1.2. Reliable information
2. Situational awareness 2.1.1. Understanding 2.1.2. Sensemaking
3. Adaptability 3.1.1. Reinventing a business model 3.1.2. Reorganizing structure and processes

Results and discussions

We interviewed restaurant owners and workers to explore the ways in which their stories expressed different measures for organisational resilience during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Table 7. Final template of organisational resilience

Codes/ major categories	Theme
1. Information Acquisition	
1.1. Communication channels	
1.1.1. Official communication with Covid-19 crisis committee	
1.1.2. Meeting with local council	
1.2. Scanning	
1.2.1. Observation and Experience	
1.2.2. Employees Participation	
1.2.3. Social media	
2. Situational awareness	
2.1. Understanding	
2.1.1. Discussion with Covid-19 crisis Committee and Municipal Guard office	
2.1.3. Employees Participation	
2.2. Preparation	
2.2.1. Ideas of modifying existing processes	
2.1.2. Ideas of implementing coronavirus protection guidelines	
3. Adaptation	
3.1. Reorganising human resources and tasks	
3.1.1. HR redistribution by duty adjustment	
3.1.2. Job shift by time distribution	
3.1.3. Worker retention	
3.1.4. Recruitment	
3.1.5. Incentives	
3.2. Redesigning safety and hygiene processes	
3.2.1. Disinfection routine	
3.2.2. Indoor service ban	
3.2.3. Removing tables and chairs	
3.2.4. No handshake poster	
3.3. Redesigning cooking and delivery processes	
3.3.1. Line cook	
3.3.2. Fresh-prepared meal	
3.3.3. Ready meal	
3.3.4. Takeaway	
3.3.5. Home delivery	
3.4. Targeting a customer base	
3.4.1. Offering specialized services	

3.5. Creating emergency communication
3.5.1. Facebook
3.5.2. Radio

Information acquisition

Just quickly after the COVID-19 pandemic event, the restaurants' owners started to gather information about the COVID-19 pandemic from formal sources such as Covid-19 crisis Committee and Municipal Guard office in Tobruk city, as well as informal sources including personal observation and social media. One restaurant owner said that:

I went to the Tobruk Medica center to meet a member of COVID advisory committee. The meeting was about the risks of coronavirus and how does COVID-19 spread? and the ways of following hygiene and safety guidelines (Owner-Interviewee-B, 2020).

Situational awareness

The restaurants' owners sought to understand the risks of COVID-19 and coronavirus protection guidelines for building reactive responses. This was done by meeting with crisis Committee and Municipal Guard office as well as employees participated in suggesting some protection procedures. As the restaurant owner explained:

We (i.e. owner and employees) greatly depended on the crisis committee advice and personal efforts to suggest types of protection procedures and cleaning materials especially alcohol 70 percent and masks as suggest by Covid-19 crisis committee (Owner-Interviewee-D, 2020).

Adaptation

The restaurants' owners translate their understanding of coronavirus protection guidelines into reactive responses. In particular, the restaurant owners redistributed the human resources. For example, Chefs work without assistants, or they have more responsibility, as he/she has become responsible for cooking and delivering the meal to customers. While the assistants are assigned to perform other tasks such as cleanliness, home delivery and spray customers' hands with alcohol before entering the restaurants. The restaurant owners also recruited new workers to reduce overcrowding and provide the service quickly and home delivery. Human redistribution and job shift played a role in reducing the number of employees who may exist at the same time. It is prohibited for two employees to be exist simultaneously at the same place. The distance between the existing employees should be at least 2 metres. As one interviewee stated:

For reducing the presence of all workers inside the restaurant (i.e., social isolation inside) the restaurant, we implementing Job shift system, as each employee and Chef do the job for four hours and are then replaced by other employees to do the same job for four hours (Owner-Interviewee-C, 2020).

The interviewed restaurants' owners redesigning safety and hygiene processes and cooking and delivery processes. For example, chairs and tables were removed, and the customers are not allowed to inter and eat inside the restaurants. Moreover, the restaurants have changed the focus from immediate or fresh cook to prior cooking (ready-meal), this plays a role in reducing the customer wait and customer-employee interaction. On the other hand, the restaurant owners have noted that repeat customers and relatives have continued to purchase from the restaurants and the restaurants owners offered free home delivery. The restaurant owners have created Facebook page as emergency communication tool to giving notifications to customers who visit the restaurants if it revealed that one employee has a positive coronavirus test.

There are two employees in front of the restaurants to spray the hands of customers with Alcohol" (Owner-Interviewee-D, 2020).

Discussions and implications

All of the restaurants interviewed survived the COVID-19 event or at least they are currently operating under the new conditions. They showed resilient responses during COVID-19 pandemic (see Table 3). The organisational resilience is embedded in three components: information acquisition, situational awareness and adaptation. The information acquisition, situational awareness and adaptation are similar in purpose to the components provided by (Alonso et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2017). However, the sub-components or sub-processes of the current components are new and different from the literature. Specifically, in contrast to earlier findings, however, organisational resilience literature has not discussed the role of employees' participation and social media as source of information acquisition and understanding during the crisis. This study contributes to the organisational resilience literature by filling a gap on the need to study the organisational resilience in the field of hospitality and tourism and provide new details about the sub-components of the organisational resilience. The findings have several implications include 1) Importance for restaurants to be continually scanning a timeline of COVID-19 developments in Tobruk city, as it is expected the second wave will start soon. This can be achieved by continual communication with COVID-19 advisory committee. 2) based on the previous step, the restaurants need to repeatedly renew their hygiene processes, and cooking and delivery processes. The second step can be done by building learning processes and educating workers.

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