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THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON BUSINESS

Norhidayah Ali
norhidayah@uitm.edu.my
Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Kedah

Azni Syafena Andin Salamat
azni_syafena@uitm.edu.my
Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies,
Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Kedah

Zuraidah Mohamed Isa
zuraidah588@uitm.edu.my
Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Kedah

COVID-19 has been declared as a deadly, infectious disease globally. It has triggered chaos in many parts of the world, impacting individuals, businesses, and governing bodies in almost every country. COVID-19 has posed immense challenges on most businesses worldwide, including in Malaysia. Nonetheless, some businesses have risen to turn threats into opportunities such as by carrying out online businesses and delivery services while adhering to the standard operating procedures (SOP) endorsed by the government. In Malaysia, all businesses were forced to close down temporarily during the early phases of the Movement Control Order (MCO) period except for those involved in essential services such as banking, basic utilities supply, and food and beverage supply. Employers were encouraged to pay full salary to employees, regardless of whether they were working from the office or from home. However, when business stability is threatened, employers tend to reduce employees' salary or working hours to prevent dismissal (Donovan & Ho, 2020).

During the early phases of the MCO, which involved almost a total lockdown on the country, the government required Malaysians to stay at home. Employees and businesses were forced to work and operate from home to prevent the spread of COVID-19 to the general population. Thus, most businesses struggled to survive, especially those operating on a brick-and-mortar basis. Some business premises were ordered to close down temporarily, while others were allowed to operate within limited business hours. Brick-and-mortar business operators found it challenging to run their business from home due to inadequate knowledge and capability in communicating using online technology.

Apart from that, the pandemic has caused some businesses to experience revenue losses of up to 80 per cent, forcing them to close down permanently due to insufficient operating cash and escalating operating costs (Muhammad, 2020). In addition, businesses that can continue to operate as usual may record dwindling numbers of walk-in customers and supplies, especially if their suppliers are affected by the lockdown.

On the bright side, to a certain extent, most businesses have been forced to operate online, leaving behind their conventional or brick-and-mortar way of doing business. This phenomenon has promoted the growth of online home-based businesses. Businesses that were already operating both physical and online stores before the MCO period have an advantage as they can ride on the situation to fulfil customers' needs and wants. Techno-savvy business operators benefit the most as they already have online tools in place for their business transactions, allowing them to multiply their sales despite operating from home.

Moving forward, Malaysia in general and businesses in particular must strategise their action plans so that the impacts of COVID-19 on businesses could be minimised. Businesses need to rise above the challenges by formulating effective action plans in ensuring that they can sustain and grow, thus turning the threats of COVID-19 into opportunities. The Malaysian

government, on its part, has provided robust stimulus packages for businesses, especially small and medium enterprises, in ensuring their sustainability and growth.

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