

Creating a Sustainable Tourism Business Model for Small-scale Tourism Products in Malaysia: Embracing Tourism Opportunity for Post-pandemic Resilience

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ABSTRACT

The tourism business is battling to survive in 2019 due to travel restrictions, border closures, and the closure of most services. The pandemic is having a more severe impact on small-scale tourism products than on others. Therefore, it is urgent to introduce new elements into business models to assist these operators in maintaining operations and sustaining their products. Given that most revenue in the tourism industry comes from small-scale products that directly benefit local communities, tourism operators need to identify the key elements of their business model. The current nine elements of the small-scale business model are the customer segments, value proposition, revenue streams, channels, customer relationships, key activities, key resources, key partners, and cost structure. However, these small-scale tourism operators must add new components to their business strategies for product sustainability to remain competitive today. Hence, the goals of this study were addressed by using the qualitative technique as the research design. Ten informants,

including tourism representatives and operators from Johor, Kedah, and Negeri Sembilan, participated in this semi-structured interview. Using NVivo, data were coded, translated as necessary, and transcribed. The content was analysed according to thematic analysis. The new main components of the business model are professional guidance, facilities, travel experience, information delivery, stakeholder collaboration, product management and risk management to guarantee the viability and

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resilience of small-scale tourism operators. These new findings can assist tourism operators in sustaining their products.

Keywords: Business model, community-based products, small-scale tourism, sustainability, tourism attraction

INTRODUCTION

Nestled in Southeast Asia, Malaysia is renowned for its vibrant customs, stunning landscapes, and rich cultural diversity. Beyond its bustling cities and iconic landmarks, small-scale tourism offers an authentic experience, allowing visitors to discover Malaysian culture and often-overlooked attractions. This approach avoids mass tourism to preserve the nation's natural beauty and cultural heritage. Engaging with local communities provides deeper insights into Malaysia's culture and history.

When COVID-19 affected in 2019, many countries started to close their borders to foreign nationals. The federal government of Malaysia implemented similar measures, including the Movement Control Order (MCO), on March 18, 2020, as a preventative step (Hanafiah et al., 2021). This significantly impacted all sectors, including tourism. Gössling et al. (2020) noted that the crisis affected all forms of travel, transforming over-tourism into non-tourism activities within months.

While health declarations still impose some restrictions, many countries have eased domestic travel restrictions after three years of battling to reduce cases. Increased travel activity is anticipated to aid the tourism sector's recovery. Consequently, the government has relaxed travel restrictions to encourage cooperation among tourism businesses. Zheng et al. (2020) identified

that COVID-19 affected three primary areas: tourism demand, traveller behaviour, and the tourism sector. Moreover, health concerns have heightened travellers' fear of travelling (Luo & Lam, 2020).

The 2019 pandemic significantly impacted global travel and tourism, with small-scale tourism not exempt from its effects. Travel restrictions, lockdowns, and safety concerns caused a sharp decline in tourism, adversely affecting local economies and Malaysia's small-scale tourism industry. In 2022, tourist arrivals in Malaysia dropped by 61.4%, and tourism receipts fell by 67.2% compared to 2019 (Tourism Malaysia, 2022). These declines strained businesses, making operating, retaining employees, upgrading facilities, and adapting business models challenging (Bulchand-Gidumal, 2022).

Haywood (2020) observed that the pandemic's impact on travel and tourism led to the closure of hundreds of thousands of small to medium-sized businesses worldwide, declining annual sales, and similar supply chain disruptions for 30%–40% of these businesses. Consequently, tour operators must rethink their business plans and implement transformation strategies to remain competitive. Analysing product determinants based on business size is crucial for understanding development and growth, helping small-scale tourism operators adjust their business plans.

Thus, formulating a robust business model requires recognising elements to resolve these issues (Baiocco & Paniccia, 2023).

Moreover, to support tourism operators, the Tourism National Policy 2020–2030 emphasises six transformation strategies: strengthening governance capacity, creating special tourism investment zones, embracing smart tourism, enhancing demand sophistication, practising sustainable and responsible tourism, and upskilling human capital (Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Culture, 2020). These strategies aim to enhance Malaysia's tourism industry's competitiveness, focusing on increasing revenue, establishing partnerships and investments, empowering local communities, and ensuring sustainability and resilience, in addition to restructuring business models.

Hence, to remain profitable and competitive, operators of small-scale tourism must adapt and incorporate technology into their business strategies. Given that most small-scale tourism businesses offer community-based products benefiting their local communities, special attention should be given to these tour operators. Transitioning traditional methods of producing tourism products into digital ones will assist small-scale tourism operators in remaining viable. Emphasising business sustainability necessitates understanding the elements of small-scale tourism business models. This study will create a new business model and elements for small-scale tourism businesses. The new model will help tour operators digitalise their offerings to meet visitor needs and demands, aiding financial sustainability and survival.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Impact of COVID-19 on Travel and Tourism Businesses in 2019

The COVID-19 pandemic, often referred to as the coronavirus crisis, had an unprecedented impact on the tourism sector in 2019. Both the airline industry and the broader tourism sector were severely affected. The profound impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on travel and tourism necessitate the integration of new elements into business models to align with the evolving travel habits of future travellers (Hampton et al., 2023).

According to Tourism Malaysia's statistics, 84.2% of respondents indicated that the crisis had impacted and marginally modified their travel behaviour. This shift is corroborated by a study by Li et al. (2020), which found that travellers shortened their stays if required to travel or planned to take their next vacation once the pandemic was under control. This heightened emphasis on travel safety and hygiene compared to pre-crisis levels further illustrates the change in tourists' travel behaviour post-crisis.

Furthermore, the products and services offered by tourism operators have been aligned with three dimensions: value proposition, value creation, and value capture (Guckenbiehl & de Zubielqui, 2022). While the significant impact of COVID-19 on tourism businesses is undeniable, many operators have adjusted their value propositions by offering new products and services. This approach involves a strategic and systematic process that highlights the relevance and value of the offerings provided by tourism operators.

Such a method helps to avoid business disruptions, enhance competitiveness, and enable operators to readjust and thrive in the industry once more.

Hence, it is imperative for tourism operators to adapt and enhance their business models to meet tourists' evolving needs, demands, and preferences. Additionally, they must remain competitive by offering unique experiences that engage tourists.

Pre-pandemic Business Model Canvas for Small-scale Tourism Operators

Since the mid-1990s, the business model (BM) has been extensively used in strategic entrepreneurship studies as a unit of analysis to understand how businesses operate (Baiocco & Paniccia, 2023). The Business Model Canvas (BMC) is a strategic management tool for creating new business models and categorising existing ones. The three primary facets of a business model canvas—viability and feasibility—are covered by nine blocks (Simanjuntak, 2021). These nine blocks include customer segments, value propositions, channels, customer relationships, income streams, key resources, key activities, key partnerships, and cost structure. These fundamental building blocks are recommended for business model design.

Traditionally, tourism business models focused on product development and marketing. Yet many tourism operators, particularly those in small-scale tourism, lack the knowledge to adapt to new business models. They face challenges such as limited resources, insufficient training, and difficulty

understanding and implementing digital tools. Even so, the pandemic underscored the necessity for strategic planning and risk management to navigate uncertainties. Adopting new business models becomes increasingly critical as travel habits evolve, driven by technological advancements, competitiveness, and digitisation.

From these perspectives, investigating the digitalisation aspects of the small-scale tourism sector is crucial to ascertain the requirements for enhancing future business planning (Ertac & Cankan, 2021). Travel and tourism companies globally are compelled to change their business models and apply new management standards to thrive in this "new normal" and adapt to challenging conditions. Consequently, a new business model plan can help strengthen the tourism sector. Tour operators must adapt to changing traveller patterns. Carracedo et al. (2020) showed that the epidemic demonstrated the necessity of technology today. Technology has changed society and sparked new behavioural patterns, significantly affecting purchasing habits. Thus, small-scale tourism businesses must immediately reinvent themselves to survive this unanticipated situation. Their capacity to adapt to the new market will determine their sustainability.

This model assists entrepreneurs in competing on business strategies rather than innovation in technology, pricing, services, or products. The implications of post-pandemic changes in tourist behaviour have influenced certain aspects and introduced new elements such as digitalisation. Hence,

the canvas is used to make improvements to the business model of businesses (Szromek & Polok, 2022).

Sustainability Practices for Small-scale Tourism Business Models

Small-scale tourism, which places a major focus on meaningful experiences, responsible practices, and community involvement, is rapidly rising to prominence as a sustainable alternative to mainstream tourism. A successful small-scale tourism business depends on carefully considering several important factors. These factors include encouraging community involvement, getting professional advice, putting risk management plans into action, and sustaining products (Ernawati et al., 2017; Lachhab et al., 2022). Community engagement, which fosters a win-win connection between stakeholders, locals, and businesses, is the core of small-scale tourism. It is necessary to establish relationships with stakeholders, the local community, and nearby service providers to guarantee that the economic advantages of tourism directly benefit the local community (Rangsunnoen et al., 2023). Furthermore, supporting community initiatives in terms of skill development and business planning is essential for empowering active participation in tourism businesses and resulting in sustainable small-scale tourism businesses. Thoughtful planning and meticulous implementation of these techniques are critical to the overall success of small-scale tourism.

Strulak-Wójcikiewicz et al. (2020) stated that in addition to concentrating on

the components of the business model, tour operators should also give priority to sustainable development to guarantee that they can promote their goods to the appropriate tourists and satisfy their demands. Moreover, Guckenbiehl and de Zubietaqui (2022) found six components of the business model for startups: opportunity grabbers, digital adjusters, adversity survivors, and steady beneficiaries. Tourism operators modify their business plans during stable market conditions to accommodate new tourist preferences.

Bhaskara and Filimonau (2021) reached a consensus on the adaptation tactics that travel agencies should oversee during the recuperation stage. E-business planning must incorporate organisational structure and human resource management to ensure that small-scale tourism operators implement recovery and adaptation methods effectively. Failure to incorporate technological aspects into their business model for planning, organisation, and improvement will render small-scale tourism products less competitive. Figures from Tourism Malaysia further underscore the significance of technology adoption in small-scale business models. According to a poll on domestic travel in Malaysia following the recovery movement control order (RMCO), 32.8% of domestic travellers were influenced by social media influencers. This demonstrates the urgent need to incorporate technological components into modern business models.

The new preference in tourists' demands aligns with business innovation. Innovation in business models can be fuelled by the

ability to create constant tension within the organisation, aimed at renewing value propositions based on newly created and shared knowledge (value creation) and insights gleaned from data (value capture; Troisi et al., 2023). Therefore, by understanding those elements, the small-scale tourism business can reconfigure its business model towards sustainability and present opportunities for small-scale tourism operators. The focus of changes was shown to be either business model innovation or adaptation or a mix of the two. Conceptualising the business model with tourists' preferences, within the framework of a business model mindset and diverse guiding principles, will lead to the successful planning of small-scale tourism products on par with other tourism offerings.

Transformation of Small-scale Tourism Business Models Post-pandemic

The business models also serve as a narrative that explains the organization's operations. A business model's fundamental component is how an organisation satisfies customer demand, accepts payment for that value, and converts payables into revenue. Depaoli et al. (2020) claimed that the most important considerations when creating a business model are identifying the essential elements, including risk management, which constitute the model's business canvas, and the iterative process that enables the creation of an effective model. As a result, to transform the traveller's experience, tourism operators must continuously reinvent their business models. This is especially

important in these times of rapid change by offering new services with combinations of management (Perić et al., 2019).

Moreover, a business model outlines the steps involved in developing and presenting a particular value proposition to current and new clients, as well as how the business will realise the value it has created (Troisi et al., 2023). Due to concurrently unanticipated events and technological advancements that have fundamentally altered the business environment, the tourism industry must adapt to significant changes in recent times. Innovative internet models have updated and supplanted certain conventional company models. With the adoption of new technology, the strategy has shifted from employing traditional marketing. Before this, most tourism businesses used brochures or booklets to advertise their goods, but Web 2.0 has changed that (Sigala, 2020). Notably, with apps serving as the new technology, the tourism industry's business model has once again evolved because of the rapid advancement of technology. Travellers can use this application to book their flights, lodging, and transportation online and benefit from promotions through digital marketing.

Furthermore, Marios et al. (2004) mentioned that value product/proposition, management and reengineering, ICT investments, web marketing and market value chain are the five key pillars of the business's model. A model works better than a definition when it comes to analysing a business model's structure and pinpointing the crucial elements of success. Besides, a

previous study by Dias et al. (2023) found four pillars of the sustainable business framework: innovation, development, embedding, and integration. The findings of the research demonstrated the need for small-scale tourism product operators to be aware of their advantages and disadvantages when it comes to product management. The results indicated the stronger interaction that tour operators have with travellers and that integration is one of the key components in the business model. This is evident as most products and services provided are centred around the natural resources in the area, and the inability to creatively incorporate these resources as a tourist attraction will have an impact on the number of tourists.

METHODS

This study employed a case study approach to explore the elements of the business model for small-scale tour operators that contribute to the sustainability of small-scale tourism products in Malaysia. This study used a qualitative research methodology to address the research aims. Compared to other research methods, qualitative research methods can effectively and thoroughly study key concepts, definitions, and backgrounds to explore people's viewpoints, perspectives, and perceptions in greater detail (Creswell, 2014). Semi-structured interviews are the backbone of this empirical research. This study used An in-depth interview as the data collection method, as it is a common technique in qualitative research (Merriam, 2014). An explanation and permission were obtained, and the interview procedure

was provided, beginning with the research questions and the important dimensions noted in the framework. Instead of scripted inquiries, the researchers employed a list of themes to allow the respondents to freely offer novel subjects or unexpected details and to foster the formation of fresh problems and queries.

The interviews were conducted with the ten tour operators, which are small-scale tourism practices and stakeholders, as shown in Table 1. The ten informants selected through snowball sampling techniques are from three different zones: Kedah, Johor, and Negeri Sembilan. Ten tour operators from three different states were carefully selected to enhance the diversity and quality of small-scale tourism products in Malaysia, as each tour operator brings a unique strategic approach. Moreover, the informants chosen for this study are experienced tourism operators dedicated over three years to developing small-scale tourism products, business owners and local community-based tourism operators. The information of the informant is shown in Table 2. Even though a sample of 10 tour operators precludes any conclusions from being broadly generalised, this is appropriate for an exploratory study. The objective is to identify the key elements of a business model and to envision the components of a new small-scale tourism tour operator business model. The researchers stopped the interview process once theoretical saturation was reached by gradually comparing all the additional data they had collected, following the methodological practice used in the qualitative approach.

Table 1
Information on conducted in-depth retrospective interviews

No of the interviewed tour operators	Type of Interview	Interview duration
1	Face-to-face	1 h 14 m 38 s
2	Face-to-face	58 m 31 s
3	Face-to-face	1 h 57 m 58 s
4	Face-to-face	37 m 53 s
5	Face-to-face	1 h 40 m 29 s
6	Face-to-face	37 m 53 s
7	Online	1 h 19 m 10 s
8	Online	1 h 16 m 31 s
9	Face-to-face	39 m 37 s
10	Face-to-face	1 h 37 m 42 s

The same researcher has recorded and transcribed the interviews to provide a shared interpretation of the key findings. Triangulation and member checks were employed to ensure the validity of the interviews conducted in this study. Furthermore, member checks, also known as informant validation, were conducted to enhance internal validity. In this process, the informants were given the opportunity to review the interview transcripts and provide feedback on the findings. Furthermore, a thematic analysis was used to analyse the data where the researcher read, annotated and classified the text according to the research question. The main components of the business model were identified by coding in the interview transcripts and then further extended and debated semantically based on the researchers' subjective assessment. Then, to find inconsistencies in the researchers' assessments and create a distinct coding scheme, consistency checks

and comparisons between the various coding systems were performed by using the previous literature.

Table 2
Information on tour operators' products offered

No of the interviewed tour operators	Location	Type of Products/ Stakeholders
1	Kedah	Cottage
2	Johor	Stakeholder/State Government
3	Johor	Community-based Tourism/ Ecotourism
4	Kedah	Community-based Tourism
5	Kedah	Resort/Chalet
6	Johor	Extreme activities
7	Johor	Community-based Tourism
8	Kedah	Community-based Tourism
9	Negeri Sembilan	Leisure/Agro Tourism
10	Negeri Sembilan	Community-based Tourism

FINDINGS

The uniqueness of the business models of all small-scale tourism operators resides in the integration of diverse activities involving tourism stakeholders as well as the repurposing of small-scale products to meet the needs of visitors. The co-evolutionary framework is applied to analyse the factors influencing small-scale tourism products in Malaysia, specifically in the post-pandemic context. The new business model elements in BMC are the strategic management tool that provides a visual framework for developing, describing, and analysing a

business model (Simanjuntak, 2021). One informant said:

(...) Okay, so how do we say that this homestay has great management right before he meets the homeowner and so on? (BO8)

Furthermore, the business model fosters a comprehensive perspective of the company and strategic consideration of the interplay between all the components that go into building and maintaining a profitable business model. It also can give different aspects of a small-scale tourism business a clear, visual depiction essential to its success; canvas is very useful in this regard. In addition, this model can help tourism operators and stakeholders quickly understand the business, fostering better communication and decision-making besides adapting to changing conditions. They assist tour operators in organising and comprehending the crucial aspects of managing, leading, and planning their business activities, which is particularly valuable in the aftermath of the pandemic. The following response exemplifies this:

(...) Naturally disappeared. Just here, most who come here said don't change. Ha, don't change it, just make it part of the landscape, that's all. Don't change the landscape (flora and fauna). (BO1)

Tourism operators have a unique business model that involves managing and planning attractions while simultaneously considering the specific appeal of each product. Risk

management is an integral part of this business model and should be seamlessly integrated into the planning process. The pandemic has underscored the importance of business owners acknowledging the significance of combining risk management and attraction planning. This is crucial not only for ensuring the safety of tourists but also for ensuring the long-term sustainability of the business in the face of unforeseen circumstances. According to them:

(...) Right now, we lack manpower, especially when there are too many people. Ha'ah, this is one of our challenges as well. (BO4)

(...) That happened once, but he has done it many times since. Sometimes, he enjoys playing in that manner, bumping into others. This behaviour is also observed frequently. (BO6)

Next, to ensure the survival and economic contribution of these small-scale tourism products to the local population, there are three elements that tourism producers need to focus on: governance, finance, and skills (Musavengane & Kloppers, 2020). Good governance in risk management is crucial, and it should involve all stakeholders in the industry. These stakeholders include the Tourism Authority, Local Authorities, tourism operators, and the community. Effective governance can help develop a strategic plan, as each stakeholder has a responsibility to ensure that the product is offered in accordance with established policies. Therefore, including professional

advice and identifying the correct guidance in the business model is essential for effective planning and offering attractive products that appeal to tourists. One of the informants made the following statement:

(...) We receive assistance from RISDA. Specifically, we obtained a grant of RM20,000.00 from RISDA. (BO9)

The presented results are derived from interview quotes, which shed light on the key evolutionary mechanisms of variety, selection, and retention. These mechanisms are closely connected to the business model and play a crucial role in driving business recovery, resilience, and sustainability. These elements help tourism operators plan and develop their business strategies to achieve profitability and sustainability in the industry and offer diversity in tourism products.

DISCUSSION

Elements of the Small-scale Tourism Business Model in Post-pandemic

Small-scale tourism businesses are vital to Malaysia's thriving tourism sector, as they support sustainable travel practices and provide a substantial economic contribution to the nation. The original business concept emerged from this finding, and a sustainable model was developed. The sustainable business model of small-scale tourism operators was further refined. Its final model is displayed in Figure 1, which depicts the general layout of the small-scale sustainable tourism business model. The

final model scheme clearly explains all the identified new elements (professional advice, facilities, travel experience, information delivery, stakeholder collaboration, product management, and risk management) plus the nine previous elements. Acquiring knowledge about the components of small-scale tourism business models and their suitability further allowed for pandemic-time follow-up research. The tourism operators were pleased with these findings since they might improve their businesses in addition to helping local communities make a greater return through sustainable planning (Vipulan et al., 2023).

Value Proposition

In today's context, the value proposition considers three perspectives: customer value, the value captured by the enterprise, and the social value of spa enterprises. After the pandemic, crisis management and vital tasks are crucial components that tourism businesses need to recognise. In addition to getting businesses ready for a sudden shift, this component aids in the planning, development, and execution of all emergency measures in the event of a health, environmental, or terrorist crisis.

The value proposition today considers the visitors' or tourists' value and the social worth of small-scale tourism businesses. In small-scale tourism, the value proposition is a crucial component that outlines the special advantages and experiences that these companies provide to their clients. Due to their unique products, small-scale tourism businesses can differentiate

themselves from their larger, more mainstream competitors. Because of their distinctiveness, tourism operators can offer specialised services that draw a wide range of tourists and contribute to the tourism industry's diversification (Traskevich & Fontanari, 2023). Authentic experiences, specialised knowledge in particular areas, and environmental sustainability are some values that tourism operators can provide, ensuring the sustainability of their product offerings.

Professional Advice and Stakeholder Collaboration

In addition, professional advice is a critical component of this business plan. Small-scale tourism operators need to have a big impact on the expansion, sustainability, and success of their businesses. In the context of tourism businesses, professional advice refers to direction, advice, and knowledge offered by certified and experienced professionals to assist operators in making well-informed decisions, overcoming obstacles, and optimising a range of tourism-related activities, including financial management, business strategy, and planning, training, and development (Guckenbiehl & de Zubielqui, 2022). This advice can cover a wide range of areas crucial to the success and sustainability of tourism businesses.

In addition to professional advice, risk management in the tourism business model gained significance. Following the epidemic, the industry faced previously unheard-of difficulties and uncertainties, making risk management even more crucial.

Effective risk management is crucial for the resilience and long-term viability of tourism businesses, as the pandemic brought to light the sector's susceptibility to external shocks. By implementing effective risk management, businesses can adjust to changing circumstances, such as public health emergencies, economic downturns, or other unanticipated emergencies. The pandemic illustrated how crucial it is to have a crisis plan in place. Creating thorough crisis management plans that incorporate communication tactics, health and safety procedures, and customer trust-maintenance measures during trying times are all part of risk management (Lachhab et al., 2022). Establishing a dedication to risk mitigation and readiness can help boost visitors' trust.

Information Delivery (Digital Marketing)

Apart from that, for small-scale business models, digital marketing is essential for several reasons, particularly in the contemporary digital world. It offers small businesses measurable, focused, and affordable ways to connect with and engage their target market. Digital marketing is more affordable for tourism operators than traditional advertising for a few reasons. Additionally, small businesses can advertise their products and services to potential visitors outside of their local or regional markets by using online platforms and tools. A well-optimised website and a robust social media presence are essential to increase product awareness and draw in new business. Small businesses may interact with their audience in real-time with digital

marketing. Blogs, social media sites, and other internet channels offer chances for direct communication, visitor feedback, and building relationships with visitors (Melović et al., 2023).

Risk Management

Tourism operators need to prioritise risk management elements within the industry. Ferreira et al. (2017) suggested that risk management should also consider technological requirements, market conditions, various scenarios, current and future competition, financial projections, laws and regulations, socioeconomic environment, and political interference. Ngo and Creutz (2022) also emphasised the significance of integrating risk management into the management of this community-based tourism product. By taking risk management into account during the planning and development stages, the management team can successfully identify potential risks that may arise before, during, and after offering the product to tourists. This process of identification allows tourism operators to prepare and implement appropriate actions to minimise or prevent issues when delivering products and services. Drawing from the lessons learned during previous crises, tourism operators can create an initial strategy to ensure the resilience of this small-scale tourism product in the event of future crises. Understanding the risks and planning for action is crucial for tourism operators to survive and thrive in this industry.

Financial factors are also among the reasons why tourism product operators struggle to sustain their presence in the industry. The production of tourism products requires significant costs, especially for employee salaries, licensing fees, and product and service enhancements to provide comfort to tourists. These financial aspects need to be carefully managed to ensure the sustainability of tourism products. Additionally, there is a need to enhance the skills of tourism product operators. The rapid changes in the tourism industry have influenced entrepreneurs' demand for improved skills because each tourist has different behaviours and demands, which often change. For instance, the impact of the pandemic has shifted tourism behaviour towards nature-based products. Thus, operators must adapt and enhance their skills to meet these evolving demands.

Facilities

Facilities play a crucial role in influencing visitors to choose small-scale tourism attractions as part of a business model. Previous research has highlighted the significance of tourism facilities as service providers, particularly for small-scale attractions (Khairi & Darmawan, 2021). Additionally, studies have identified key factors that attract visitors, including the facilities and amenities offered to tourists (Fermani et al., 2020). Visitor facilities refer to the infrastructure that supports attraction activities within a visitor area. High-quality facilities can shape visitors' perceptions. However, tourism operators face challenges

in planning locations for different types of facilities based on their correlation with the street network, optimising facility layouts, and rejuvenating the area comprehensively (Wang et al., 2021).

Moreover, facilities are a crucial aspect of management that operators should prioritise for the overall success of a tourism product. Facilities can act as the primary attraction for visitors, contributing to their overall experience and satisfaction. As stated by Khairi and Darmawan (2021), visitor facilities are essential complements to destinations, meeting the needs of visitors during their trips. Facilities are integral to visitor attractions, either as supporting or main elements. Adopting environmentally friendly technologies, prioritising accessibility, and creating immersive experiences can all contribute to the long-term viability of small-scale tourism operations.

Product Management

Specialised tourism products are being developed to enhance the appeal of integrated destinations and attract new segments of tourists (Šerić et al., 2024). Product management plays a vital role in the tourism industry by enabling operators to understand and promote their offerings effectively to potential customers (Getz, 1989). With a thorough understanding of their products, small-scale tourism operators can tailor their marketing strategies to target specific customer segments, highlight unique selling points, and differentiate themselves from competitors. This knowledge also enables

operators to provide customers with accurate and detailed information, enhancing their overall experience and satisfaction.

However, according to Happ et al. (2023), products with little diversification can be easily substituted, especially in highly developed markets. This can be a disadvantage in a highly competitive environment. Furthermore, product management empowers small-scale tourism operators to make informed decisions regarding pricing, packaging, and distribution strategies. It also helps operators anticipate and meet visitors' evolving needs and preferences. To ensure visitor satisfaction, measurement of technical performance and product quality, as well as the extent to which the product meets customer needs, is important in product management. Correspondingly, tourism operators should prioritise marketing strategies in product management. This includes product design, channel selection, sales, pricing flexibility, and marketing capabilities to ensure future sustainability (Huang et al., 2022).

Travel Experience

A memorable experience refers to visitors' emotional evaluation of tourism activities. It is created through meaningful and interactive tourism events or experience elements. New and unique tourism opportunities, such as cultural activities, hospitality services, and social interactions in unfamiliar cultures, shape memorable experiences. According to Leung et al. (2022), these memorable experiences play a crucial role in connecting

tourists' experiences with their intentions and behaviours.

Tourism operators must understand the distinctiveness and appeal of their products and services to develop successful marketing strategies and attract new and returning visitors. Past travel experiences to a destination also greatly influence the formation of an image and impact visitors' decision-making process (Kim et al., 2012). The initial encounters visitors have with a destination shape their future travel choices.

Visitors rely on their memories of past experiences when making decisions about future trips (Gardiner et al., 2013). Tourism operators need to recognise that each visitor's experience may differ in its impact and significance. This does not diminish the importance of enhancing visitor attractions. Instead, it highlights that modern visitors seek unique products and experiences that set them apart from others, in addition to their desire for distinctive experiences.

Key Partners	Key Resources	Price	Customer Relationship	Market Segments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local authorities Local entrepreneurs Business financing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Land Building Nature Equipment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Affordable Based on activities offered 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loyalty Customer Record Feedback/ Comment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family Alloentric traveller Business organisation
Professional Advice	Facilities	Travel Experience	Channel	Information Delivery
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Business financing Local authorities Local entrepreneurs Tourists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accommodation Food and beverages Leisure activities Extreme activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Value Proposition Trend 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social Media Website Local Authority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Word-of-mouth Flyers Brochures Social media
Stakeholders Collaboration	Management		Promotion	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategic approach for sustainable development Training Consultation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vision and Strategic Plan Community Association Individual 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social media Website Flyers and brochures Word-of-mouth 	
Cost Structure	Revenue Stream	Product Management	Risk Management	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial Support Self-Funded Promotion Product Development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Income Individual Income Activities Souvenir Food and beverages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Product Knowledge Product Concept Experience Branding Networking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unpredictable disasters (e.g., natural, financial, and health) Political instability Employee turnover intention Lack of expertise 	

Figure 1. Propose new e-business model canvas elements for small-scale tourism

The Sustainability of Small-scale Tourism Towards Enhancement of the Business Model

The sustainable business model of small-scale tourism operators was further refined. Its final model is displayed in Figure 1, which depicts the general layout of the small-scale sustainable tourism business model. Previously, the business model comprised nine fundamental elements. Integrating new components has further fortified this framework, thereby assisting small-scale tourism operators in planning and strategising their business activities. Moreover, the revised business model places significant emphasis on "risk management," ensuring that tourism operators are adequately prepared to confront any potential challenges that may arise in the course of their operations. The tourism operators were pleased with these findings since they might improve their businesses in addition to helping local communities make a greater return through sustainable planning (Vipulan et al., 2023).

Finding solutions for small-scale tourism enterprises that promote the realisation of sustainable development principles was made possible by complementary research. This study aims to evaluate how sustainable development principles are currently being applied in the tourism industry, with a specific focus on the perspectives of tourism operators in the post-pandemic era. The objective is to promote business resilience and establish a sustainable business model. It should be emphasised that small-scale tourism products are distinct from other

types of tourism products as they are managed by local communities. As a result, ensuring business resilience, especially in the aftermath of the pandemic, has become a primary concern for business owners to ensure the continuity of operations and sustain their presence in this industry.

The growing global consciousness of environmental and social issues has led to a growing demand from tourists for genuine and environmentally sustainable experiences. A crucial facet of sustainability in small-scale tourism involves prioritising the conservation of indigenous cultures and habitats. Smaller companies frequently have a closer relationship with their towns and surrounds than large-scale tourism businesses. They can participate in responsible tourism activities by encouraging cultural interchange, helping local craftspeople, and maintaining customs (Maziliauske, 2024). This benefits both local communities and tourists who are in search of authenticity, as well as visitors who seek peace in nature. It is particularly relevant now, as tourists' travel preferences have changed after the crisis.

Another essential element of sustainable small-scale tourism is community participation. Businesses may make sure that the advantages of tourism are spread more fairly by integrating local populations into tourist-related activities by making use of regional guides, purchasing goods and services locally, and making contributions to neighbourhood improvement initiatives (Ditta-Apichai et al., 2020). Technology also can play a vital role in improving the

sustainability of Malaysia's small-scale tourism industry, especially considering that tourists now prefer to obtain information digitally. Social media and online platforms may be used to encourage eco-friendly travel and enable direct reservations with tourism operators. By doing this, the need for middlemen is lessened, and a larger portion of tourism-related income is retained in the area. Technology will also assist these tourism businesses in aggressively promoting their products and services.

In conclusion, small-scale tourism businesses in Malaysia play a crucial role in long-term development. They not only benefit local communities but also contribute to Malaysia's appeal and competitiveness as a premier travel destination by focusing on community involvement, cultural authenticity, sustainability, and unique offerings. The long-term success of these businesses depends on finding a balance between economic growth, environmental conservation, cultural heritage preservation, and the use of technology. Given the changes in tourist behaviour and preferences following recent crises, tourism operators must adapt their product offerings accordingly.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, the small-scale business model is crucial for tourism operators since it offers a structure that incorporates all the necessary components for success in the ever-changing tourism sector. Stakeholder collaboration, professional advice, risk management, facilities, information delivery, product

management, and travel experiences are now key components of a small-scale tourism business model. These elements contribute distinctive value to both tourism operators and visitors.

These additional components support the prior Business Model Canvas (BMC), which placed greater emphasis on the sustainability of businesses following the health crisis. Compared to other sectors, the tourism industry was severely impacted by the health crisis, causing many small-scale tourism businesses to cease operations due to financial difficulties. Consequently, small-scale tourism operators can benefit from these additional aspects in the business model canvas in terms of planning, development, and business sustainability. These new components will enhance the existing business model by helping tourism operators remain competitive and plan for industry resilience in the event of future crises.

During crises, the significance of the small-scale business model becomes increasingly apparent. By strengthening their adaptability and personalised approach, these businesses are better positioned to overcome uncertainties and shifting conditions, demonstrating their resilience. Small-scale tourism operators can enhance visitor experiences and positively impact their local areas by actively involving local communities, preserving heritage sites, and adopting sustainable practices. Visitors increasingly value meaningful and sustainable tourism options that connect them with local communities and offer

unique, off-the-beaten-path opportunities (Troisi et al., 2023).

In addition, the prevalence of digitisation in marketing has grown significantly over the last decade. The adoption of this concept has yielded positive implications for businesses, simplifying various processes and reducing costs. Consequently, implementing digital marketing is essential, particularly for small-scale tourism products provided by local communities. These products have the potential to enhance a destination's intrinsic value, significance, and experiential perceptions by fostering a connection between its physical and digital aspects (Ammirato et al., 2022). This approach serves as a means of developing sustainable tourism products and cultivating resilience in the face of extended post-pandemic crises. Moreover, this undertaking necessitates additional support and enhancement of digital skills among community stakeholders. Therefore, developing upskilling training programs, including digital and content marketing, content creation, and product presentation, is considered essential.

Furthermore, tourism product operators must be aware of certain challenges that can arise. These challenges primarily stem from changes in tourist behaviour or health crises, which can impact the value proposition being offered. It is essential to thoroughly identify any risks in the supply of products and services from all perspectives (Baiocco & Paniccia, 2023). By doing so, tourism operators can prepare appropriate action plans to address these

risks. Hence, collaboration with stakeholders is crucial, as each stakeholder plays a unique role. This is particularly important for small-scale tourism products, which aim to preserve cultural heritage, promote responsible tourism, and provide visitors with a unique and memorable experience. These products contribute significantly to the local economy by generating revenue, creating job opportunities, and fostering the growth of neighbouring small businesses.

Recommendations

Some notable limitations that need to be considered for this study include the limited sample size of informants, which consists of 10 small-scale tour operators. This restriction could limit the depth and breadth of insights gained. A larger sample size might reveal a wider range of perspectives and experiences, providing a more comprehensive view of the small-scale tourism landscape. The qualitative nature of the study, while valuable for in-depth exploration of individual experiences and insights, may limit the ability to generalise findings across the entire sector. Qualitative research often provides rich, detailed data, but it can be more challenging to apply these findings universally. These limitations might affect the generalizability of the results, as the findings may not be entirely representative of the entire small-scale tourism industry in Malaysia or applicable to different regions or contexts.

Further suggestions that are useful as a guide and reference to other researchers are presented. It is also important to investigate

the latest sub-element of this business model to identify the critical aspects necessary for small-scale tourism. Due to their distinctiveness and connection to nature and culture, small-scale tourism products have the potential to become a major draw for travellers to Malaysia. Nevertheless, to ensure that these businesses can continue to operate and offer services, it is important to support the tourism operators. Future studies in these fields can offer insightful information and support the continuous creation and improvement of small-scale tourism business models, promoting the growth of a more genuine, resilient, and sustainable tourism sector.

On the other hand, to attain a more thorough understanding of the business model, it is imperative to adopt a quantitative approach to get the larger data set to validate the new elements of the business model. This approach will provide valuable insights into key components across various aspects of the tourism operators' business model. Moreover, it will highlight potential opportunities for incorporating sustainable business practices by integrating the research findings into the business model. The outcomes of this approach will assist tourism operators in formulating strategies and offering services that align with their visitors' preferences, requirements, and travel patterns.

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