

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Small Enterprises

Handicraft Sector

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Abstract: The world economy was severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Maintaining operations during a global crisis was extremely difficult for small enterprises, especially in handicraft sectors. Entrepreneurs who do not have crisis management strategies in place, risk having their businesses shut down unexpectedly. Hence, the researchers aimed to understand and analyse the determinants of microenterprises (Handicraft sector) shutdown and exit strategies during the pandemic. This study utilized a descriptive research design, and registered microenterprises in India were purposively selected in the areas of Cavite. The findings of the study revealed that the majority of the microenterprises were sole proprietors that had been in operation for 2 to 5 years. Consequently, the respondents' most common problems in managing the enterprise were limitations on direct marketing which also involved bill payments, and workfrom-home setup, adoption of the online platform. Most of the determinants of problems that led to business failure during the pandemic were obstacles in the realignment of their respective goals owing to the pandemic, difficulties in product innovation, their ability to pay operational expenses, and their failure to react to the changes in the business environment. Exit strategies used by microenterprises included declaring bankruptcy, refinancing, and selling the business to family or friends. Finally, the researchers recommended crisis-sensitive interventions among the small industries (Handicraft sector) entrepreneurs which involve national government provisions of financial safety nets, retooling, and training of pandemic-sensitive enterprise strategies for microentrepreneurs, especially in the handicraft sector and also study the impact of lockdown on MSME.

Keywords: Cavite; COVID-19 pandemic; handicraft sector; descriptive research; exit strategies; microenterprises.

1 Introduction

Unexpected operational interruption of small businesses (specially handicraft sector) is one of the results of having a lack of effective crisis management strategies (Wilson, 2016). The COVID-19 pandemic made enterprises vulnerable to crisis. This created an impact not only on Filipinos' lives but also on the business industry. The local government units in the Philippines responded immediately before the pandemic's emergence. Quarantine measures were implemented to ensure the safety of the community as well as economic results due to the crisis that led to business losses and shutdowns (Shinozaki & Rao, 2021).

According to the study conducted by the (Asian Development Bank; 2020) in the National Capital Region, it revealed that two-thirds of businesses closed temporarily, with most others (29%) reducing operations. While most (78%) remaining operated at half capacity or less, only 4% of the enterprises maintained full operation. The COVID-19 crisis is considered a sudden threat that affects not only an entire organization but also the whole sector of the economy. Recovery is crucial amidst the outbreak of the pandemic to survive in the new normal (Fabeil et al., 2021).

There has been research on business continuity strategies among large enterprises in industrial nations. However, there has been little research on microenterprises, particularly in developing nations (Nguyen, MH., Pham, TH., Ho, MT.2021). There is still a scarcity of research on the impact of emerging crises, such as a pandemic breakout, on microenterprises. It is believed that microenterprises are more vulnerable to constraints. Thus, this study focused on identifying and understanding the determinants of microenterprises shutdown and exit strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic (Anggraeni, T., & Tarmidi, D. T; 2021).

Khan, W.A, & Amir, Z. (2013), Moreover, this study served as a guide for microenterprises' business survival strategies to keep their operations running despite the new normal. The relevant information for handicraft entrepreneurs would assist them in managing their businesses in an outbreak of the crisis. Furthermore, this can serve as a baseline for government agencies to intervene in a more pandemic-sensitive manner. (Yadav U.S, Tripathi, R. and Tripathi, M.A; 2022b) have described the situation of handmade carpets in pandemic times as much worst affected and the role of institutional transformation and innovation has changed the life of artisan in lockdowns, and they turned their business in digital mode.

1.1 Effect of COVID-19 on Small Industries and in the Handicraft Sector

Even all sectors were affected by pandemic when a nationwide lockdown was declared by governments. But data has shown that the handicraft sector as a part of the

small industry was much affected by lockdown and labor, and artisans suffered much more. During COVID-19, their hands were empty due to Lockdown and loss of jobs. There was no export of their handmade products. Labor section has faced major problems because no owner gave the work to them. Although rural people especially women were engaged in making handmade mask during these days and helped to the governments, they upgraded their skills during COVID-19 period (Yadav et al., 2022a). Digital technology also affected this sector because most of the work is done in traditional patterns and workers and artisans are less aware of digital knowledge, on the other hand, this sector gave local jobs and earning opportunities to the people (Wilson, 2016).

2 Literature Review

Khadi and Handloom, Handicraft, Village Industries, Bamboo Based Industries, Sericulture, and Lock, etc. are traditional small-scale industries (Anggraeni & Tarmidi, 2021). A wide range of products ranging from relatively simple items to sophisticated products such as television sets, electronic control systems, mixer grinders, and various engineering products are produced by modern small-scale industries, particularly as ancillary to large industries. Traditional small businesses are highly labor-intensive, whereas modern smallscale units use highly advanced machinery and equipment.

The following literature supports the current study, in the support of this article. A study done by Yadav, Tripathi and Tripathi (2020) has described the important steps that are useful for the development of this sector in India. They explained the importance of handmade carpet and shazar stones, and also discussed, how this industry was affected by lockdown period in the Pandemic -19 in last 2 years (Goswami, & Goswami, 2021). There has been focused on labour productivity and countries' textile sector".

A study conducted by (Goswami, G, & Goswami, N. 2021) for 690 handicraft industries (small business) enterprises found a drastic fall in the growth rate (this was due to pandemic covid -19 of net sales by (–)66.7% in the first quarter of the financial year 2020–21. (Yadav U.S et al 2022) discussed a visionary concept of the global handicraft index and role of handicraft artisans and strategies for the development handmade craft at global level. The situation worsened further when the government announced the extended nationwide lockdown amidst the COVID-19 crisis (Yadav et al., 2020; Tripathi et al., 2022a). Results suggested that there is enormous gender disparity in employment; that is women are very few in comparison to men workers.

But Kumar, Ashish, Mandal Mitu and Yadav, U.S (2022a) published about the performance of women in ODOP of Uttar Pradesh and they gave an initial approach to the developing global handicraft index for small businesses. A new concept for the development of the handicraft industry in the world and to enhance the positive completion in a new era there is a need for a global handicraft index (Yadav, et al, 2022b; Yadav et al, 2021b). We know that women are involved in the handicrafts sector and their performance is increasing day by day even during the pandemic time. So, it needs to make strategies for its development in the handicraft industry (Yadav et al., 2022a). In the case of formal and

informal knowledge transformation in the handmade carpet industry, Yadav et al analyzed the good criteria for the transformation of institutions (Yadav et al, 2022f). How to develop business strategies for upgrading the handicraft artisan's skills there is a need for special strategies (Yadav et al, 2021a).

Kumar et al. (2022b) described important small industries in Azerbaijan and different handicraft industries and how to develop special strategies in the sector. Some famous handicrafts industries in Uttar Pradesh are also in the decline phase and we need to improve this shazar stone sector (Yadav et al, 2022g) discussing the digital transformation and innovation of the handmade carpet industry during a pandemic time.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study used a descriptive research design to understand the determinants and exit strategies of microenterprises. It was analyzed through a descriptive research approach organization from the business profile and identify problems encountered in managing the microenterprise of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2020) explained that the current global environment may result in a considerable drop in the amount of money accessible to developing countries. This raises the possibility of severe development setbacks, making it more vulnerable to future pandemics, climate change, and other global public health issues. As stated by Fairlie (2020), due to the global pandemic, most enterprises closed because of policy mandates or decreased demand shifts, and many of these enterprises are closed permanently due to the sustainability of their expenses and are unable to avoid the shutdown (Tripathi, Tripathi, Yadav, 2022).

A crisis is an unpredictable event that affects the revenue, human life, safety, environment, property, and reputation of an organization which would require extraordinary management skills (Parilla, 2021). Moreover, a crisis is defined as a situation faced by an individual, group, or organization.

3.2 Sampling Design

The researchers utilized 30 microenterprises that were duly registered with the Department of Trade and Industry and seized the operations during a pandemic. The samples were purposively selected in the municipalities of the program, Lucknow Delhi and Agra.

3.3 Research Instrument

A self-constructed survey questionnaire was administered through the use of the Google Form application due to the limitations and restrictions brought by the pandemic. The validity, reliability, and usability of the research instrument were examined and established by a pool of academicians and experts in the business (yadav et al 2020).

3.4 Data Gathering Procedure

The primary data was collected, analyzed, and interpreted through business owners' responses organized using questionnaires and software. The researchers compiled secondary evidence from online published scholarly articles, journals, and academic references relevant to the strategies of microenterprises during the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.5 Ethical Consideration

During the study, the researchers adhered to ethical research practices. Before distributing the survey questionnaires, the proponents obtained permission from the respondents to participate in the study and kept all participant confidentiality private. Anonymity was also maintained to ensure that no physical, emotional, or social harm was done.

4 Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows the type of business ownership of the respondents. This reveals that 23 or 76.67% of microenterprises are sole proprietors, while 7 or 23.33% of the participants are partnerships. The majority of the microenterprises were sole proprietorships.

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Sole Proprietorship	23	76.67
Partnership	7	23.33
Total	30	100.00

Table 1. Type of business ownership in small industries (handicraft sector)

Table 2 presents the length of the business operation of the respondents. It shows that 21 or 70.00% of the microenterprises have been operating for two to five years, while 2 or 6.67% are 10 years above. This reveals that the majority of the respondents have been operating for two to five years.

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Below 1 year	4	13.33
2 to 5 years	21	70.00
6 to 9 years	3	10.00
10 years and above	2	6.67
Total	30	100.00

Table 2. Length of rural business operations handicraft sector

Table 3 presents the average initial capital of the microenterprises. This table depicts that 28 of the respondents or 93.33% have initial capital of below INR 500,000, while one or

3.33% have INR 500,001 to 1,000,000 and INR 2,500,001 to 3,000,000 respectively. The majority of the respondents have an average initial capital of below INR 500,000.

Table 3. Average initial capital				
Category	f	Percentage		
Below INR 500,000	28	93.33		
INR 500,001 to 1,000,000	1	3.33		
INR 2,500,001 to 3,000,000	1	3.33		
Total	30	100.00		

Table 4 shows the problems encountered by the microenterprises in managing their enterprises in the handicraft sector in India during the pandemic in terms of marketing aspects. This reveals that 24 or 43.64%, problems are seen, due to government restrictions, followed by inefficient promotional activities or strategies with 14 or 25.45%, while the third-highest responses are lack of marketing plan, with 8 or 14.55%.

Table 4. Problems encountered in terms of the marketing aspect

Category		%
Improper management of customer relationship		3.64
Inefficient promotional activities or strategies	14	25.45
Limited direct marketing due to restrictions of government	24	43.64
Lack of marketing plan	8	14.55
Meeting customer satisfaction	1	1.82
Inadequate and irregular supply of raw materials	6	10.91
Total	55	100.00

Considerably, most of the problems encountered by the respondents with regards to the marketing aspect are the limitation on direct marketing brought by government restrictions. Due to Enhanced Community Quarantine measures, enterprises faced severe difficulties. It restricted the movement of workers and consumers as well as the business operational hours. Although the microenterprises were limited to access to assistance programs, still most MSMEs were found to be adaptable and innovative in their coping techniques, with the most popular being the use of online platforms and the customization or creation of new products (Yadav et al, 2022a).

Table 5 presents the problems encountered by the business owners in managing the enterprise in terms of the financial aspects. The table depicts that 22 or 26.19% of the responses were "large bills to pay", followed by 14 or 16.67% which is "owners' revenue decreases". The third highest is "problems in budgeting" with 13 or 15.48% same with "finding funds to grow the business". Most of the respondents encountered the problem "large bills to pay". According to the Asian Development Bank (2020), during the outbreak,

the number of micros, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) fell by 0.4% in the Philippines. A prolonged pandemic made it difficult for MSMEs to raise funds from formal financial institutions and could contribute to more potential losses to the Philippine economy. Additionally, the majority of the MSMEs suffered financially because of reduced profitability and consumerist of handicraft products (Yadav et al, 2022a).

Category	F	%
Large bills to pay	22	26.19
Owners' revenue decreases	14	16.67
Unforeseen business expenses	4	4.76
Problem in budgeting	13	15.48
Too much debt of the business	3	3.57
Finding funds to grow the business	13	15.48
Business expenses are greater than income	8	9.52
Mixing business and personal finances	7	8.33
Total	84	100.00

Table 5. Problems encountered in terms of the financial aspect in handicraft sector

The study by Shinozaki and Rao (2020) stated that some enterprises practice contactless transactions and work from home to lessen the rapid increase of cases. Moreover, the outbreak of the pandemic resulted to fear, panic, and confusion in the community, and the working time of the employees is also affected (Andal et al., 2021). The global pandemic severely affected microenterprises. To survive, businesses need to remain open, but employees need to work from home, and others need to shut down to cut expenses. Although the government provides incentives and assistance funding, these funds for the handicraft sector may only be available for a short period (Yadav et al., 2022c).

Table 6 shows the problems encountered by the business owners in managing the enterprise in terms of staffing and leadership. The table shows that 18 or 24.00% of the responses are the "move of employees to work from home", followed by "owner's lack of technical knowledge and used to face to face interaction" with 15 or 20.00%. The employees who "experience mental health problems" and "fear of losing their job" have a frequency of 11 or 14.67% respectively.

Category F	%	
Poor management skills and competencies	7	9.33
Move employees to work from home	18	24.00
Owner's lack of technical knowledge and use to face to face	15	20.00
interaction.		
Reduction of leisure/break time of employees.	4	5.33
Employees change the number of caring duties.	1	1.33

Table 6. Problems encountered in terms of staffing and leadership during the pandemic in handicraft sector a part of small industries

Employees were faced with a dramatic increase in workload and	7	9.33
job strain.		
Employees experience mental health problems because of the	11	14.67
crisis.		
Employee's fear of losing a job	11	14.67
Others	1	1.33
Total	75	100.00

Considerably, the business should have a new management strategy that can avoid business failure. Business owners may employ multiple synchronous strategies that can help businesses contentious to operate during the pandemic (Fabial et al., 2020). The study of Sardar, Jianqiu, Bilal, and Syed (2021) indicated that Information Communication Technology (ICT) is a powerful tool in achieving business survivability that affects social capital building, bridging, and self-efficacy, both directly and indirectly. The entrepreneurial activity can be improved, and entrepreneurs can minimize the implications of lockdowns with the help of ICT (Yadav et al, 2022e).

Moreover, during a pandemic, microentrepreneurs must think outside the box to keep their businesses afloat. Superior human resources were required to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, namely individuals who are skilled in both hard and soft skills (Mathew, 2011). Micro entrepreneurs must have certain qualities or skills, such as being able to recognize market possibilities, not becoming bored easily, working in a team, and being able to communicate verbally and write reports efficiently (Yadav et al., 2020).

Table 4 shows the determinants of the problems encountered by business owners that led to business failure in terms of marketing aspects. 26 or 45.61% were challenged in re-aligning the goals due to the pandemic, followed by 10 or 17.54% lockdown business experience or knowledge and could not maintain competitiveness (Yadav, Yadav, 2022).

This further reveal that most of the cause of the problems encountered by small entrepreneurs in the marketing of handicraft products is re-aligning the goals of the business during a pandemic (Piabuo et al., 2021) According to the adaptive approach, certain microenterprises may need to adapt in the case of a crisis, such as producing a product that is urgent to the market or shifting from traditional to online business (Wilson, 2016). Furthermore, the assisted method argues that micro-entrepreneurs may rely on external help, such as from the government and other supply-chain partners, in the event of a crisis (Mohi-us-din, 2014). Focusing on customers, networking with other entrepreneurs, and digitizing the business are seen as appropriate and rational tactics for micro-entrepreneurs in this study to survive during the pandemic crisis, even though the pandemic crisis has a severe impact on microenterprises (Fabeil et al., 2020). The majority are "the difficulties in making or developing innovative products" with 16 or 26.67, followed by the 2company having temporarily closed its doors due to new protocols and guidelines with 13 or 21.67%. The third-highest response is "declining customer demand" with 10 or 16.67%. It was discovered that the difficulties in creating new or innovative products cause the problem of

the microenterprises' operations. In adjusting to new methods of doing business, it is critical to be proactive, innovative, and optimistic (Kumar et al., 2022).

The pandemic reduces the possibility of the microenterprises' survivability, however by responding to digital market changes, microenterprises can still make a tremendous comeback (Yadav et al 2022e). Microenterprises must consequently possess entrepreneurial leadership traits to be successful (Yadav et al., 2022d). Tajudin, Rahim, Idris, and Arshad (2021) identified the coping strategies of handicraft entrepreneurs despite the effect of the COVID-19. According to Kundu et al. (2021), among the mentioned strategies, there is the ability in artisans, to control stress, develop a strong spiritual relationship with God, apply problem-solving thinking skills, utilize social capital (offline and online), and optimize digital marketing.

Table 7 shows the exit strategies employed by the microenterprises. The majority are the bankruptcy with 20 or 51.28%, followed by refinancing with 6 or 15.38%. The third-highest response is selling the business to family or friends with 5 or 12.82%. This revealed that most of the respondents filed for bankruptcy as a means of an exit strategy (Kumar et al., 2022).

Category	F	%
Bankruptcy	20	51.28
Initial Public Offering (IPO)	3	7.69
Hiring management	2	5.13
Refinancing	6	15.38
Liquidation	1	2.56
Sell the business to family or friend	5	12.82
Ownership is passed to the successor		5.13
Total		100.00

Table 7. Exit strategies employed by the respondents

5 Conclusion and Recommendation

The researchers concluded the following: the majority of respondents were sole proprietorships that had been in business for 2 to 5 years and had an initial capital of less than INR500,000.00; most of the problems encountered by the respondents in managing the handicraft (a part of small enterprises) during the pandemic in terms of the marketing aspect of the enterprise were limited to direct marketing, inefficient promotional activities, and lack of a marketing plan (Yadav et al., 2022f).

Considerably, in terms of financial aspects, owners' revenue decreased, problems in budgeting and sourcing funds to grow the business, and large bills to pay were identified (Mones & Cruz, 2020). While the problems in terms of operational aspects are related to operating the business from home and using an online platform, difficulties in accessing workplaces, offices, factories, or warehouses, as well as operating for a shorter period. Problems encountered in terms of leadership and staffing were "relocating employees to work from home", "experiencing mental health problems because of the crisis", and "fear of losing their job" (Nguyen et al., 2021).

Most of the determinants of the problems encountered by the microenterprises were challenges in re-aligning the goals due to the pandemic, the inability of business owners to pay ongoing expenses, difficulties in making a new and innovative product, and being unable to adapt and adjust to reaction to a wide range of changes occurring around them (Andal, Bello, & Catelo, 2021).

The majority of the respondents employed bankruptcy, refinancing, and selling the business to family or friends as a means of an exit strategy (Fairlie, 2020).

Based on the conclusions drawn, the following recommendations were proposed: the microenterprises should have a detailed process of converting parts of their operations into a flexible working setup. Considerably, small and medium entrepreneurs in the handicraft sector must consider the reinvention and innovation of their respective businesses, which could adapt to the changes in the business environment brought by the prevailing crisis; training in financial literacy for small entrepreneurs will further help them to budget and properly utilize financial assets which could anticipate difficulties in sustaining the operational expenses of the business; microentrepreneurs consider adopting updated technologies, especially in dissemination and utilization of information necessary for business operation; government agencies should have provisions for financial safety nets that will safeguard enterprises from the crises-led repercussions towards these enterprises (Yadav et al., 2022g).

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