

## Model of resilience strategies of small and medium-sized tourism enterprises post pandemic crises in marine-based destination

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**Abstract:** This study investigates the resilience strategies employed by small and medium-sized tourism enterprises (SMTEs) in Tanjung Bira, a marine-based destination in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, to cope with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Duchek's Model of resilience, which conceptualizes resilience as a meta-capability composed of three stages (anticipation, coping, and adaptation), is used as a key framework. An exploratory qualitative approach was employed, involving in-depth semi-structured interviews with seven informants representing various tourism stakeholders. Thematic analysis revealed several main strategies for SMTE resilience: collaboration with stakeholders, government intervention, implementation of digital marketing, strengthening SMTEs legality, and strengthening/diversification of SMTE products. Mapping these strategies onto Duchek's Model, the anticipation stage included strategic planning, risk assessment, and building dynamic capabilities; the coping stage consisted of immediate financial measures and policy support; and the adaptation stage involved diversification, technology and innovation adoption, and collaboration and networking. A key implication is that destination management organizations should create innovative products and leverage online platforms for marketing to increase visitor arrivals and boost SMTE product sales. The findings contribute to understanding SMTE resilience in the context of a marine-based destination in Eastern Indonesia and provide insights for policymakers and practitioners to support SMTE recovery and long-term sustainability post-pandemic.

**Keywords:** COVID-19 pandemic, Duchek's model of resilience, marine-based destination, resilience strategies, SMTEs, stakeholder collaboration

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### Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the tourism sector, specifically the people's economy at the lowest level (Ghaderi et al., 2022; Ghorbani et al., 2023; Munawar et al., 2021). Since the lockdown period, business activities have been in disarray with a policy prohibiting each country from conducting direct transactions. Specifically in Indonesia, PPKM (lockdown) has become a policy that has significantly impacted access to individual businesses, including Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). On the other hand, the tourism sector requires the SME sector as one of the driving forces of the tourism business in every destination in Indonesia (Fauzi & Sheng, 2022; Mardiatmi et al., 2023; Saputera et al., 2021).

Existing tourism SMEs or SMTEs can be in the form of business activities that are included in the tourism business: providing transportation, accommodation, food and beverage services as well as tourism activities at tourist attractions (Harchandani & Shome, 2021; Tarapuez et al., 2016). This business activity has provided an opportunity for the community to contribute money-wise so that it becomes a source of income for the community itself. It cannot be denied that the tourism industry is one of the most promising business opportunities and

can continuously provide visitors when it is well managed because the need for recreation will never end. However, a crisis such as COVID-19 can disrupt business continuity for the community. Furthermore, most tourism-related services are impacted by the regulations intended to prevent viral spread (mobility limits and social segregation), which produce supply shocks; tourism appears to be particularly susceptible to a health crisis (Arbulú et al., 2021).

The tourism business based on the Tourism Law Number 10 of 2009 regulated in Indonesia consists of the business of tourist attractions; tourism resorts; tourist transportation services; tourism travel services; food and beverage services; accommodation; organising entertainment and recreation activities; organising meetings; incentive trips, conferences, and exhibitions; tourism information services, tourism consulting services; tour guide services; water-based tourism; and spa. The community can also develop these types of businesses as SMEs in tourist destinations, which serve as their source of income. In this case, the SME sector has the potential to contribute to national and regional economies. It can become part of the backbone for the recovery of the national and regional tourism sector after the COVID-19 pandemic. SMEs and tourism have an intertwined relationship because the business activities of SMEs in the tourism sector can also lead to the quality of destinations. SMEs enhance the tourism experience with diversity, innovation, and a personal touch, and tourism offers SMEs a platform for development, business prospects, and exposure to a global market (Tolstoy et al., 2021).

In the context of the business resilience of SMEs in maritime-based destinations, further exploration is still needed through in-depth studies specifically for sustainable economic development in the tourism sector (Williams et al., 2020). It is undeniable that tourism, as one of the driving forces of the economy, has the potential to reach communities at the grassroots level. SMEs in the tourism sector have the potential to drive local economic growth, create employment opportunities, promote local culture and heritage, and enhance community well-being. Tourism businesses in destinations before COVID-19 had economic impacts on the local community (Mohammed Said Al-Mughairi et al., 2022), but these businesses require efforts to rebuild and sustain them after COVID-19, necessitating appropriate strategies for the continuity and resilience of SMEs in this sector (Widiastini et al., 2023).

The vulnerability of the tourism sector and its potential impact on the economy are caused by COVID-19. Tourism is one of the industries that COVID-19 has severely hit; every level of the tourism sector is exposed due to the host of imposed operational containments on SMTEs. As one of the essential contributors to the countries' Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the tourism sector is suddenly facing the risk of imminent collapse as many businesses embrace themselves for the significant scales of retrenchment and total loss of income.

Arcese et al., (2021) assert that most companies in the tourism industry are characterised by small size and family ownership, indicating their status as small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The interplay between family and business represents an exclusive entrepreneurial culture that has the potential to evolve into transgenerational entrepreneurship, serving as a primary economic engine within the tourism sector. This kind of SME is more vulnerable and may need particular strategies to be resilient in times of crisis. The pandemic has significantly impacted the sustainability of SMEs, particularly in the tourism sector. Klein & Todesco (2021) argue that SMEs are frequently less secure, and their dire situation is made more difficult by traits including a lack of specialist knowledge and financial constraints. The ongoing pandemic has had a significant impact on most sectors globally. However, its effects on SME businesses have been severe, especially for those operating within the tourism and hospitality industries. These SMEs are particularly susceptible due to their reliance on government policies and regulations regarding travel. Therefore, it is essential to conduct further research focusing on the impact of COVID-19 on tourism SMEs and their workforce. Additionally, policymakers must implement targeted measures to support these enterprises and help them adapt and innovate.

Saad et al. (2021) address the need for further resilience research, specifically to enhance understanding from the perspective of SMEs. Kukanja et al. (2020) argue that different types of tourism SMEs may require tailored resilience strategies but there is limited research that differentiates the resilience needs and strategies among these various sectors. They also contend that most studies focus on immediate crisis management practices and short-term strategies and there is a need for research which explores long-term resilience strategies that

can sustain SMTEs beyond the immediate aftermath of a crisis. Furthermore, research on the role of policy and institutional support in fostering the resilience of SMTEs needs to identify effective policies and institutional frameworks can help in creating supportive environments for SMTEs (Badoc-Gonzales et al., 2022). Through the exploration of journal database (google scholar) research conducted in the context of SMTEs in Indonesia has been dominated by the Western Part of Indonesia, as the area is more developed economically than the Eastern Part of Indonesia (Hidayati & Permana, 2022; Aurelia et al., 2021). This study was conducted in South Sulawesi Province, located in the Eastern Part of Indonesia, which has several well-known marine-based tourist attractions, one of them is Tanjung Bira.

This study contributes significantly to both the hospitality industry and academia by providing insights into the resilience strategies of small and medium-sized tourism enterprises (SMTEs) in a marine-based destination in Eastern Indonesia, specifically Tanjung Bira in South Sulawesi. It applies Duchek's Model of resilience to analyze SMTE strategies, offering a structured framework for understanding how SMTEs build resilience before, during, and after crises. By mapping identified resilience strategies onto this model, the research provides a comprehensive view of how different strategies fit into the overall resilience process for SMTEs. The findings contribute to understanding SMTE resilience in the context of a marine-based destination, offering practical insights for policymakers and industry practitioners on supporting SMTE recovery and long-term sustainability post-pandemic. By focusing on SMTEs in Eastern Indonesia, the study helps address the imbalance in tourism research between more developed and less developed regions of the country. The qualitative, exploratory approach provides rich, contextual data that can inform future quantitative studies on SMTE resilience in similar destinations, bridging gaps between theory and practice and offering both academic insights and practical recommendations for building resilience in the vital SMTE sector of the tourism industry.

### **Context of SMEs in Indonesia**

The regulation of SMEs in Indonesia is contained in Law Number 20 of 2008, which regulates the types and criteria of SMEs. Based on this law, the Indonesian government differentiates the definition of micro, small, and medium enterprises. MSMEs in Indonesia refer to Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises. These enterprises play a crucial role in the Indonesian economy, contributing to employment generation, poverty reduction, and economic growth. The definition of MSMEs in Indonesia is based on two primary factors: assets and annual revenue.

Micro enterprises are the smallest category of MSMEs, with total assets worth up to 50 million Indonesian Rupiah (IDR) and annual revenue of up to 300 million IDR. Small enterprises are the next category in the MSME classification. A business is considered a small enterprise in Indonesia if it has total assets worth between 50 million and 500 million IDR and has annual revenue between 300 million and 2.5 billion IDR. Medium enterprises are the largest category within the MSME classification. They can be classified as medium enterprises in Indonesia if a business has total assets worth between 500 million and 10 billion IDR and annual revenue between 2.5 billion and 50 billion IDR. These definitions may be subject to change as per the policies and regulations of the Indonesian government. The government often revises these criteria to accommodate changes in the economic landscape and provide appropriate support to MSMEs.

### **SMEs in Tourism**

SMEs are critical players in the tourism industry worldwide. They provide significant employment opportunities, promote regional economic development, and foster entrepreneurship. SMEs, however, have proven to support the economy mainly through employment (Al-fady, 2020; Bouazza, 2015; Rotar et al., 2019), flexibility to operate, entrepreneurship (Lewandowska & Stopa, 2021), and holding subsidiary operations like supply chain to larger firms. However, SMEs face various challenges, such as limited financial resources, insufficient expertise, lack of access to international markets, and competition with larger firms. Despite these challenges facing tourism-related SMEs globally, entrepreneurs should capitalise on available opportunities when provided. For instance, fostering partnerships among different players in the value chain

(Selviaridis & Spring, 2022), such as governments at various levels working alongside private sector partnerships, would create an enabling environment for optimised, sustainable outcomes across all stakeholders.

Asthana (2022) notes that the relationship between small businesses and tourism is not commensalism but rather mutualism, as the tourism industry also benefits from the presence of small businesses, and small businesses play a crucial role in expanding policy effects to the micro level for the tourism industry. This mutualistic relationship implies that tourism businesses and tourists benefit from the relationship by creating mutually advantageous interactions. In other words, both parties gain advantages and engage in interactions. This relationship can also be linked to tourism products, which should provide experiences for tourists, as creating tourism products is inseparable from delivering services that offer experiences for tourists.

SMEs represent the tourism industry's backbone and provide high-quality services to increasingly sophisticated customers who desire an "all-in-one experience" (Maggioni et al., 2014). Despite their importance to the tourism industry, SMEs often need help with challenges that can hinder their resilience and longevity (Conz et al., 2017; DiBella et al., 2023), including limited resources, lack of access to financial and technological resources, lack of marketing expertise, and insufficient support from government agencies. However, to survive unexpected shocks like the recent COVID-19 crisis and be successful in the long run, SMEs need to demonstrate resilience by being adaptive, innovative, and strategic in their operations (Zighan et al., 2022). Developing a strategic plan for SMEs in the tourism industry is required to ensure business continuity (Fabeil et al., 2020; Lo & Sugiarto, 2021; Lehan & Kamarudin, 2023) despite disruptions and aid in post-pandemic recovery. In addition, collaboration with other SMEs within the industrial stakeholders and leveraging digital technologies can also aid in fostering resilience (Khurana et al., 2022; Kumar et al., 2023; Klein & Todesco, 2021).

### **SMEs Facing crisis to be resilient**

Business resilience refers to an organisation's ability to effectively respond, adapt, and recover from various challenges, disruptions, or crises while maintaining its core functions and achieving long-term success (Sahebjamnia et al., 2015; Corrales-Estrada et al., 2021; Saad et al., 2021). To prevent prolonged decline within organisations and achieve strategic resilience, adopting a more comprehensive perspective on resilience is crucial (Duchek, 2020). Small businesses need more organisational development to cultivate resilience (Burnard & Bhamra, 2011). Ineffective leadership, absence of proper planning, and inflexible frameworks impede their capacity to adjust to market disturbances (Knight & Cavusgil, 2022; Khanzad & Gooyabadi, 2021; Pal et al., 2014).

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the tourism industry. The crisis has been particularly devastating, especially for SMEs within the tourism sector. Most studies on the Impact of Covid 19 reveal that financial factors primarily impact SMEs worldwide. Next, SMEs could be more secure (Klein & Todesco, 2021). Their dire situation is made more difficult by traits including a lack of specialist knowledge and financial constraints. The pandemic has resulted in a trend of decreasing travel and tourism, pushing many SMEs within the industry to the verge of bankruptcy. Further, it highlighted that the impact of COVID-19 on SMEs, in general, is more severe than that on larger companies. This situation can be actual for SMEs in the tourism and hospitality industries, where SMTEs rely heavily on government regulations related to tourist travel. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented a significant crisis for small businesses, requiring them to reassess their strategies and develop proper crisis planning to survive and recover (GorjianKhanzad & Gooyabadi, 2021). Additionally, as Lashley & Rowson (2010) contend, the tourism industry comprises small and medium-sized enterprises. Therefore, the impact on SMEs is significant not only for the individual businesses themselves but also for the overall health of the tourism industry (Khlystova et al., 2022). SMTEs and the creative economy have been significantly impacted by COVID-19. The SMTEs rely heavily on government policies and regulations regarding travel, making them particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of the pandemic. Furthermore, Bui & Ngo (2022) highlighted the economic, ecological, institutional, and social impact of COVID-19 on tourism resilience, emphasising that the crisis has significantly impacted tourism SMEs' ability to remain resilient in the face of adversity.

This notion highlights the need for a comprehensive approach to address SMEs' challenges in the tourism industry.

To help tourism SMEs adapt and innovate, Estiri et al. (2022) proposed a framework for selecting resilience policies during the pandemic. Governments increasingly prioritise promoting innovation within SMEs (Bertello et al., 2022). Additionally, more research must be done to support these enterprises affected by COVID-19, considering their unique characteristics and vulnerabilities (Ahmed et al., 2021). These findings imply that keeping SMEs with policy measures targeted explicitly towards them can help them sustain through an otherwise challenging time; as seen from evidence, few examples of good practices emerging around voucher schemes providing targeted liquidity support or loan guarantees designed and accessible to micro-enterprises exist.

Crises are inherent in business operations within every organisation. Each business entity employs its approach to overcome the crises it faces. According to Garcia-Haro et al. (2021), the most significant factor contributing to business failure is financial crisis. Financial failure is an internal factor within an organisation that arises due to poor investments made by SMEs. However, the onset of financial crises is also influenced by external factors, such as global health and economic crises. In dealing with crises Thorgren & Williams (2020) indicated that SMEs take immediate action by postponing investments, reducing labour costs, cutting expenses, and negotiating contracts and terms. Additionally, the data highlights how SMEs are reluctant to undertake actions that would increase their debt-to-equity ratio during ongoing crises (Thorgren & Williams, 2020). To further enhance the resilience of SMEs in the tourism industry, there needs to be an emphasis on building innovative and dynamic capabilities that will help them gain a competitive advantage in the face of unpredictable challenges (Seow et al., 2024). By drawing insights from scholars, it becomes evident that business resilience involves proactive measures such as strategic planning, risk assessment, and adaptability. It also encompasses a holistic approach that aligns various components and stakeholders and emphasises the role of leadership and effective crisis management. These factors collectively contribute to an SMTE's ability to navigate challenges, recover quickly from disruptions, and maintain long-term success in a dynamic and uncertain business environment.

### *SME strategies for resilience*

Several authors have discussed strategies for business resilience in the SME sector, both at a global and local level. Gamage et al. (2020) developed strategies including expanding dynamic capabilities, R&D expenditure, technology innovations, new partnerships, being part of the international supply chain, social capital and flexible relationships with partners, internet and electronic commerce, credit grant schemes, SMEs database, and linkage formation. Nurunabi (2020) claimed that renewal strategy or business transformation, cost-leadership strategy, financial sustainability, crisis management, and the government's continued support and stimulus package are other resilient strategies to cope with the crisis. Furthermore, Zutshi et al. (2021) include collaboration, openness, taking advantage of opportunities/ victory, and durability for resilience strategies. Collectively, this range of resilient strategies aims to enhance organisational resilience and enable businesses to cope effectively with crises.

Resilience strategies for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the tourism sector have been explored by scholars, considering the specific challenges and characteristics of the industry. Diversification as a resilience strategy is vital for SMEs (Ahmed et al., 2021), especially for SMEs in tourism (Badoc-Gonzales et al., 2022). SMEs should consider diversifying their customer base, products, and markets. By offering a range of tourism experiences, targeting different customer segments, and exploring new markets, SMEs can reduce their vulnerability to disruptions in specific markets or customer segments. Next, the significance of innovation and technology adoption for enhancing SMTEs' resilience must be considered a resilience strategy (Camisón & Monfort-mir, 2012; Hjalager, 2002; Türkes et al., 2021). SMTEs should embrace technological advancements and innovative practices to improve operational efficiency, enhance the visitor experience, and adapt to changing customer preferences. This conception includes adopting digital marketing strategies, implementing online booking systems, and leveraging data analytics for better decision-making. Diem et al. (2021) highlighted the importance of col-



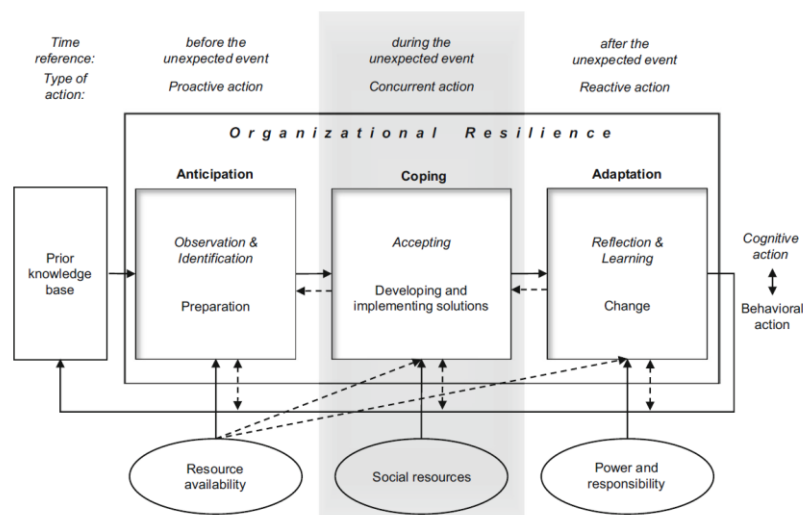
laboration and networking as resilience strategies for tourism SMEs. SMEs can strengthen their resilience by forming partnerships or cooperatives with other tourism businesses or organisations. Collaborative initiatives can lead to resource sharing, joint marketing efforts, knowledge exchange, and collective responses to challenges or disruptions. Asthana (2022) emphasises the importance of various strategies contributing to the resilience of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the tourism industry. These strategies include enhancing the performance of SMEs, adopting transformational leadership, promoting resilience and sustainability within SMEs, fostering entrepreneurship, and improving competitiveness. In line with that, SMEs should adopt sustainable business practices that consider environmental, social, and economic dimensions (Yacob et al., 2022). By embracing sustainable tourism principles, SMEs can enhance their reputation, attract eco-conscious customers, and contribute to the long-term viability of the tourism destination.

Furthermore, destination management organisations play a substantial role in supporting the resilience of tourism SMEs (Bhaskara & Filimonau, 2021). SMEs can benefit from collaborating with DMOs, which provide digital marketing support (Zainal-Abidin et al., 2023), crisis management assistance (Jiang & Ritchie, 2017), access funding opportunities (Jones & Haven-Tang, 2005), and navigate challenges collectively (Abidin, 2021). These scholarly references suggest that resilience strategies for SMTEs involve diversification, innovation and technology adoption, collaboration and networking, sustainable practices, and engagement with destination management organisations. By implementing these strategies, tourism SMEs can enhance their ability to withstand disruptions, adapt to changing market conditions, and seize opportunities for growth and sustainability.

### **Duchek's Model of resilience**

Duchek's model conceptualizes resilience as a meta-capability composed of three stages: anticipation, coping, and adaptation. This model emphasizes the importance of understanding the relationships and interactions between these stages to develop a comprehensive resilience strategy (Duchek, 2020). Business resilience is defined as the ability of an organization to sustain its value proposition despite unexpected current and future disruptions. This ability can manifest at various levels, including individual, team, organizational, and environmental levels (Radic et al., 2022). It involves both short-term adaptability and long-term strategic planning to return to a predefined starting position quickly after a disruption and to integrate long-term benefits from changing conditions. Business resilience is a holistic approach that combines risk management, business continuity planning, and organizational agility to ensure that an organization can maintain its value proposition despite disruptions.

Duchek (2020) came up with three key components in her model including anticipation, coping and adaptation. The anticipation stage involves identifying potential risks and preparing for them before they occur. It includes risk assessment and proactive planning to mitigate potential disruptions. The coping stage focuses on managing the crisis effectively. This includes crisis management strategies, clear action plans, and designated roles and responsibilities for team members. While the adaptation stage involves learning from the disruption and making necessary adjustments to improve future resilience. This can include innovation, process improvements, and strategic changes to better handle future disruptions. By understanding and implementing the stages of anticipation, coping, and adaptation, organizations can develop robust strategies to enhance their resilience and thrive in a Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous (VUCA) World (Andersson & De Paula, 2022; Olano, 2022). Duchek's Model provides a comprehensive framework for SMTEs to build resilience by focusing on anticipation, coping, and adaptation stages. By adopting this model, SMTEs can enhance their ability to withstand, adapt, and thrive amidst adversity, ensuring long-term sustainability and success.



**Figure 1.** Duchek's Model of Resilience (Duchek, 2020)

Duchek's model was chosen as the guiding framework for this study because it provides a comprehensive approach by defining three successive resilience stages - anticipation, coping, and adaptation. This staged model allows for examining SMTEs' resilience strategies at different phases. Additionally, the model incorporates both proactive elements like anticipating potential crises in the anticipation stage, and reactive elements in the coping and adaptation stages. This aligns well with the study's aim to identify a range of strategies SMTEs used before, during and after the pandemic. Furthermore, by mapping the identified strategies to Duchek's three stages, the study is able to provide a structured and dynamic understanding of how the various strategies fit into the overall resilience process.

## Methodology

This study is qualitative research that uses an exploratory approach. Qualitative research considers the overall locations and individuals involved to gather data on their encounters with a particular phenomenon or event (Bryman, 2016). The utilisation of qualitative methodology in this research provides an advantage as the researchers directly inquired with related stakeholders of SMEs in tourism about the actions and decisions that enabled their businesses to withstand the strategic challenges posed by the pandemic. It aims to find new conceptual problems to develop further the impact of COVID-19 and strategies that can be used based on the views of SMTE actors and other supporting stakeholders.

The study employed semi-structured interviews, guided by an interview protocol developed from the research objectives and a comprehensive literature review. The protocol was refined through pilot testing with academic peers to ensure clarity and relevance. Each interview, lasting 40 to 60 minutes, was conducted face-to-face and recorded with the informants' consent. Participants were recruited using purposive sampling techniques to ensure a diverse representation of stakeholders in the SMTE sector. Initial contacts were established through professional networks, industry associations, and local government agencies. The recruitment process involved identifying key stakeholders where potential informants were identified based on their roles and involvement in the SMTE sector, outreach and engagement where initial outreach was conducted via phone calls, explaining the study's purpose and inviting participation and screening and selection where informants were selected based on their willingness to participate and their relevance to the research objectives. Criteria included their experience and knowledge of SMTE resilience strategies. All participants provided informed consent before the interviews, ensuring they were fully aware of the study's aims and their rights as participants. This systematic recruitment process ensured that the selected informants were well-positioned to provide valuable insights into the resilience strategies of SMTEs.

To enhance the validity and credibility of the findings, the study employed methodological triangulation, combining multiple data sources and methods. Firstly, data triangulation was used by collecting data from different stakeholders to capture diverse perspectives on SMTE resilience strategies. Secondly, methodological triangulation was used interviews and document analysis to corroborate the findings and provide a comprehensive understanding of the resilience strategies employed by SMTEs. The study involved seven informants, a number deemed sufficient based on the principle of data saturation. Data saturation occurs when no new information or themes emerge from the data, indicating that the sample size is adequate to capture the full range of perspectives on the research topic. Given the exploratory nature of the study and the depth of the interviews, seven participants provided a comprehensive understanding of the resilience strategies employed by SMTEs in Tanjung Bira. This sample size aligns with qualitative research guidelines, which suggest that smaller, focused samples can yield rich, detailed data suitable for in-depth analysis.

The data were collected from seven informants representing various stakeholders in the SMTE sector: an academician (R1), a tourism office staff member (R2), the head of the hotel and restaurant association (R3), a souvenir shop owner (R4), a silk weaving center owner (R5), a street vendor (R6), and a water-based activities operator (R7). The interviews were transcribed verbatim, and the transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-phase guide: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. Thematic analysis allowed for the systematic organization and categorization of data to identify recurring patterns and themes. This iterative and inductive process ensured that the analysis was flexible and adaptable to the unique characteristics of the dataset and research objectives. The coding process involved multiple rounds of review to ensure consistency and reliability, with themes being refined and validated through continuous comparison and discussion among the research team.

## Results and Discussions

### *Key Business Types of SMEs in the Destination*

In the Tanjung Bira area, there are 7 (seven) types of SMTEs related to the tourism sector. These types are based on the products and services provided by SMTEs actors. The first type of SMTEs is food/confectionary souvenirs. These SMTEs consist of businesses that sell cakes and traditional snacks. Enterprises managed by families nominate this business, and all are classified as micro businesses. Most products are sold on the street, and the sellers visit the accommodation when visitors check out. The second type of SMTEs is SMTEs of non-food souvenirs consisting of souvenir businesses that sell silk products, miniature Phinisi boats, miniature traditional houses, t-shirts, and other souvenirs. The types of SMTEs are still classified as micro businesses. The third one is SMTEs of entertainment providers, including businesses that provide karaoke and 5% alcoholic drinks. Local tourists mostly enjoy these entertainment services and belong to small businesses. Other SMTEs in the area are accommodation providers of hotels, inns, bungalows, and homestays. These MSMEs are classified as small to medium enterprises. Next, SMTEs are culinary and beverage providers, and they are businesses in the form of restaurants, bars, and cafes. Businesses in this field are generally classified as small to medium businesses. Furthermore, some SMTEs focus on water-based activities. These SMTEs include businesses providing facilities and activities such as banana boats, flying doughnuts, floating tubes, etc. Finally, SMTEs of travel service providers are also available in the destination, providing water transport services and marine-related tours around the area. Based on the types of SMTEs, the businesses are dominated by micro and small enterprises in the area.

SMTEs play a vital role in supporting and driving local economies in tourist destinations (Mxunyelwa et al., 2019; Ekechi et al., 2024). By providing employment opportunities, generating income, and encouraging the use of local resources and technology, SMTEs contribute significantly to poverty alleviation and economic development in the regions where they operate (Agupusi, 2007). The diverse range of SMTEs (like in Tanjung Bira) highlights the importance of these businesses in supporting and driving the local tourism economy, with their products and



services catering to the needs and preferences of both local and international visitors (Ramli et al., 2022; Serman & Sims, 2023; Iqbal et al., 2023; Tahir et al., 2023).

### **Strategies in Dealing with the Prolonged Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on SMTEs**

The COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc on small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in tourist destinations, particularly in the Tanjung Bira area. During the lockdown, SME owners were greatly affected. The initial three months of the government-imposed lockdown in 2020 were highly challenging for SMTEs as the entire area was closed off. Initially, there were visitors despite the lockdown period; however, the local community did not allow visitors to enter the area due to public fear and efforts to protect the area. Based on interviews with SME actors, they took several steps to survive during and after COVID-19, such as selling personal assets, adapting human resource management, and changing livelihoods. Several comments related to this:

"I had some gold savings, which I sold to survive. Thankfully, while operating and providing banana boat rides, we saved some of our earnings by buying gold. We sold our gold to face this situation. If the Covid-19 situation persists, we struggle and look for alternative ways to survive." (R7)

"The accommodation managers here implemented three approaches to manage their employees, depending on their financial situation. Some accommodation providers directly terminated their staff. Some reduced the number of employees, while others adjusted work shifts, resulting in partial salary payments. Some hotels continued paying their employees in full without any reduction." (R3)

"During Covid, we had to survive. So, my husband and I had to go fishing in the sea. We caught fish but could not sell them because our neighbours were fishing and could not sell their catch either." (R4)

After the aforementioned difficult period, the situation started to improve regarding people's mobility, as the restrictions on outdoor activities were dismissed, allowing tourism businesses in the SME sector to resume their operations. Creating and managing SMTEs takes work; it requires comprehensive strategic measures to ensure the sustainability of SME activities and their positive impact on the local economy. The strategic steps obtained from the interviews conducted in this research are as follows:

### **Collaboration with tourism stakeholders**

SMTEs heavily rely on tourist visits to destinations because visitors are the ones who will purchase SMTE products. The more visitors come, the more opportunities SMTEs have to showcase their products. Therefore, it is essential to collaborate with all stakeholders in providing tourism products that can attract tourists to the destination, allowing them to stay and spend time there, ultimately leading to the purchase of SMTE products. Additionally, effective promotion of the destination will also attract tourists to visit. Collaboration with all stakeholders within the destination is crucial for the Tanjung Bira region so that visitor numbers, length of stay, and tourist expenditures can increase. Two representative statements related to this can be seen as follows:

"I have noticed that tourist visits to Tanjung Bira depend greatly on the quality of products and promotional efforts from the government, tourism business operators, and related parties. I believe the destination in Bulukumba Regency needs to be well-managed by working with all stakeholders in good governance. I also believe that stakeholders' involvement will positively impact increasing visitor numbers, later providing opportunities for small and medium enterprises to grow because visitors can purchase their products. Especially for us in the accommodation sector, we can also experience high occupancy rates when more tourists come" (R3)

"I think collaboration is needed in the destination because it is important. If collaboration occurs, it is easy for the destination to develop SMTEs. Every stakeholder can understand their role in doing whatever strategies they may implement" (R1)

### Government Intervention

The government plays a crucial role in enhancing the growth and quality of SMEs in the tourism sector. To ensure the survival of SMTEs, they require financial and non-financial support. Financially, SMTEs need capital to support their operations in the Tanjung Bira area. This support can be primarily provided to microenterprises heavily impacted during the COVID-19 pandemic, as they faced a severe lack of capital. Financially, these businesses had to start from scratch because their income ceased entirely and was depleted during and after COVID-19. Expressly, support is provided for employee wages to sustain the operations of SMEs that employ workers in their businesses. Significant comments related to this are:

"Our business is small, and during Covid-19, we could only sustain ourselves with our previous income. We spent a lot of our money because there was no more revenue. To start our business, we need adequate capital. We sincerely hope for government assistance, such as initial capital, so that we can produce snacks to sell to visitors" (R6)

"We also hope the government can help us with funds for our operations. Our equipment has started to be broken when not in use, and we need to repair it" (R7)

"We want our business to survive and employ local people, but we need capital to pay their salaries so that they can also earn a decent income. We hope that the government can assist us by providing financial support, enabling us to re-employ local people" (R5)

The non-financial support expected to strengthen MSMEs includes technical guidance through training and mentoring. This non-financial support aims to improve product quality, management, and human resources. The training and mentoring encompass various aspects, such as creating higher-quality products, product marketing, financial management, service provision, and enhancing the skills of product makers. Additionally, assistance in the provision of tools is also provided. Statements related to this:

"We also need training to learn how to improve the quality of our products. We have already produced silk products, but we want to enhance their quality in the eyes of our customers." (R5)

"I feel good if the government can provide training on effective marketing for souvenir products. Perhaps I need guidance on online marketing strategies and how to generate online sales as well" (R2)

One of the desires of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in tourist destinations is to achieve high sales of their products and services. The sales of products and services are closely related to online and offline marketing efforts. The presence of technology provides opportunities for digital marketing of goods and services from MSMEs, and digital marketing has become one of the strategies to mitigate the impact of COVID-19. Particularly in digital marketing, using social media for promotion has been effective. Two representative comments are:

"I think I need online marketing. I want to introduce my souvenir products, and one way is to use Facebook to promote my Phinisi boat product. Alhamdulillah has yielded results, as several customers have placed orders before purchasing. I think internet marketing should focus more on creative means of using interesting content, especially social media. We need guidance to effectively utilise social media and create attractive websites for marketing purposes" (R4)

"I always deal with SMTEs, especially when I do community service. One of the weaknesses of most SMTEs is to deal with marketing. In this case, they do not consider digital marketing, especially using digital platforms for promotion. They also need some skills in developing content and managing the digital marketing of their products" (R1)

Furthermore, some MSMEs still rely on word-of-mouth promotion for their products and services within specific community circles. For example, a silk souvenir product only utilises a community of mothers to generate sales for silk fabric. These MSMEs are aware of their weak utilisation of digital promotion, thus requiring additional efforts to promote their products through suitable digital platforms. One of the statements related to this:

"Now, my customers are mostly mothers or women from different towns and regencies who know my product through their friends. I do not even have an Instagram account, especially managing it to create promotional content. My younger sibling is willing to handle it, and she needs good skills to make good content" (R5).

### *Strengthening products and diversification of Products*

SMTEs require high-quality products, necessitating production processes supported by adequate equipment and quality product packaging. Currently, the existing product quality requires diversification to provide customers with a range of product choices offered by SMTEs, and thus, it needs product development. Tourists have diverse preferences towards the products shown; innovation is required to create quality goods to attract them. A fundamental aspect of product enhancement also lies in considering the specific hygiene aspects, particularly the proper packaging of food items. Furthermore, the products refer to authentic products with characteristics aligned with the local wisdom of the Tanjung Bira region. Several representative comments include:

"We sell our products as they are, but sometimes our customers comment that the small food items we sell must be properly packaged to ensure hygiene and prevent damage. Therefore, we need guidance to package our products effectively" (R6)

"We always encourage existing SMEs to prioritise the quality of their products. Naturally, these products should embody local wisdom and be representative of the distinctive features of the region." (R1)

"Our sales include marine tourism packages in the surrounding area. Hence, we need to be innovative in offering attractive programs. The creation of captivating tourist attractions and activities must also support our innovations. This responsibility also lies with the government and academia to explore the potential of the marine environment and develop it into appealing products for tourists" (R7)

Tourism products that incorporate attractive attractions and activities should be more innovative, which can attract more visitors. If the products are of high quality, the number of visitors will undoubtedly increase. Many people come to stay and also purchase souvenirs here." (R2)

### *Strengthening SMTEs Legality*

The legality of SMTEs is the main factor for the government to assist them because registering their businesses will make it easier for the government to facilitate assistance and support their business development. Assistance can be provided by the government both in financial and non-financial support, such as improving the quality of human resources, improving product quality, and training in marketing efforts. However, most MSMEs, especially businesses run by families classified as small businesses, rarely have a Business Permit because they avoid

taxes on their business. MSMEs will be free from business taxes by regulations in force in Indonesia, which are still poorly understood by MSMEs. One of the informants, an academic researcher studying micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), stated:

"In 2021, after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, I conducted a study, and the findings revealed that, on average, SME owners require financial assistance. However, when the government intended to assist them, they encountered various constraints related to the legality of their businesses. Most family-run small businesses are reluctant to register their businesses as they aim to evade taxes. This impediment prevents them from receiving the assistance since one of the requirements for eligibility to have government support is to be registered as a legal business enterprise" (R1).

This viewpoint was further reinforced by a government staff member from the Tourism Department, who remarked:

"We face difficulties assisting because many MSMEs do not meet the eligibility criteria due to a lack of permits. Most MSME owners complain about the challenges of requesting aid, but the process becomes complicated when they lack a business permit. I believe they fear taxation, although it is unrelated" (R2).

In this study, SMEs in the tourism sector consisted of 7 (seven) types and were dominated by small-scale businesses in the study area. In line with the view of Arcese et al. (2021), the characteristics of companies in the tourism sector are small-scale and family-owned businesses. This view shows that the tourism sector touches the grassroots level in supporting the economy of a destination. Concerning strategy, this study found 5 (five) main strategies that need to be implemented to deal with and strengthen the existence of SMTEs in the post-COVID-19 situation. First, collaboration between stakeholders in destinations is crucial because SMTEs depend on destination management. This strategy implies that a well-managed destination will attract more tourists, and the impact is that purchases of products and services from MSMEs in that destination will also increase. Second, digital marketing is becoming urgent due to technological advances in business destinations. The third is a strategy related to government intervention that can strengthen MSMEs' financial and non-financial capabilities. The fourth is a strategy related to product strengthening and diversification of MSME products, where this strategy is more related to the MSME capabilities of competitive products. Finally, there is a need to strengthen the legality of MSMEs, and this strategy is fundamental to creating a protected and recognised business in terms of product quality.

Collaboration in managing destinations with multi-stakeholders is essential according to their specific role in developing SMEs in a destination (Yunita, 2022; Supriyanto et al., 2024; Rubio-Mozos et al., 2020). In line with that notion, this study also emphasises that the need for collaboration at destinations can have a good impact on the quality of destinations so that they can increase the number of visits, length of stay, and high spending levels and, in the end, will contribute to SMTEs through consumption of these SMTEs products. Collaboration will generate innovation for SMTEs because each stakeholder will play a role and contribute. For example, academics will produce research that can develop innovative products according to the market, the government will be able to strengthen facilitation in product research and development, and other stakeholders will provide support for both marketing and production processes. Thus, Kuščer et al. (2021) stress that destination management organisations (DMOs) are essential in assisting tourism SMEs with resilience.

Business expansion is needed for SMEs through stakeholder collaboration that leads to value cooperation with stakeholders regarding new capabilities, technologies, and processes (Robert et al., 2020). The success of a destination as a whole is becoming increasingly dependent on the growth of collaborative ties among businesses at the same level of the value chain (Maggioni et al., 2014). In the context of destination governance, collaboration to create innovative tourism products (Cehan et al., 2021) and marketing of attractive destinations (Soteriades, 2012; Pansiri, 2013) can improve the quality of destinations so that the number of visits and visitor spending increases in the destination. On the other hand, quality tourism SMEs will also be able to strengthen the competitiveness of destinations (Jones & Haven-Tang, 2005) because by catering to tourists' most particular needs and demands, SMEs play a critical role in offering suitable goods and services to them (Novelli et al., 2006).

In this study, the term government intervention combines government efforts desired by SMTE actors, academics, and the government itself so that the policy directions for developing the business carried out by the SMTEs themselves are clear. Even though government intervention can hinder MSMEs in the form of investment (Ye et al., 2022), government intervention is one of the expected steps. It can be effective in encouraging and maintaining SMTEs in the area. COVID-19 has an impact on finances, and the results of this study also reinforce that the financial factor is the main impact of Covid 19, specifically on layoffs and temporary and permanent closures of existing SMTEs. The study by Klein & Todesco (2021) also found that finance is the main factor impacting layoffs and business closures.

Furthermore, enterprises, mainly small-scale businesses, must be given prompt assistance from government officials and policymakers to survive the pandemic and recover if required (Kyung & Whitney, 2020). Governments have recognised that providing financial assistance through loans, grants, and subsidies is the most impactful way to help small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the tourism industry recover after a disaster (Estiri et al., 2022). One of the policies for intervention is the convenience in granting credit to SMEs because Kusumaningrum et al. (2019) found that the ratio of SMEs credit to GRDP in Indonesia has a national impact on inclusive economic growth. Therefore, one effort to overcome this is the intervention from the government to support SMTEs financially for capital to strengthen their business in reopening or enhancing their business capital in the form of initial operational funds as expected by SMTEs' actors based on the suitable stimulus scheme which should be in line with the regulations. Although measures taken by countries to support small businesses have improved their financial conditions, more is needed for long-term resilience (Khanzad & Gooyabadi, 2021). Thus, future government economic interventions should be planned to increase expansion (Adegoke et al., 2022). Furthermore, government policies can pose challenges in implementing interventions as they may need to target the intended beneficiaries accurately, necessitating robust considerations through appropriate studies regarding the type of interventions for SMEs.

In this condition, SMEs should integrate digital-based marketing by internalising knowledge and technology (He et al., 2023; Sharma et al., 2021). This strategy enables SMEs to sell online and target tourists. Luh & Mahyuni (2021) recommend enhancing digitalisation support for SMEs' marketing processes. SMEs can configure digital marketing by expanding their market to tourist destinations, such as hotels, restaurants, tourist attractions, and villages. Furthermore, it is essential to note that the SMTE marketing model requires integration with the tourism industry and impacts destinations' competitiveness (Jones & Haven-Tang, 2005). The study's results demonstrate that digital marketing is a strategic tool for SME practitioners to compete with their rivals and ultimately survive. Digital transformation aims to ensure survival in the face of technological changes and developments (Fitriasari, 2020).

The existence of SMTEs is one of the main pillars of the national economy because it has a vital role in absorbing employment, equitable distribution, increasing people's income, boosting economic growth, and realising national stability (Yáñez-Araque et al., 2021). Thus, the government must provide support through ease of capital, tax facilities, and legal protection. However, the government has sought support, but the legality of the situation presents a challenge to the government's efforts to assist, as state finances are subject to strict requirements for administration and accountability to prevent the misuse of public funds. The legality of SMEs (Anggraeni, 2021) emphasises that SMEs must fulfil these requirements to compete in the free market era. Legality impacts protected businesses, certainty in doing business, and enjoying the convenience and security they deserve so that they can contribute more significantly to increasing the added value of production, supplying goods and services needed by the community, absorbing labour, and disseminating entrepreneurial growth. In the context of comfort, businesses can enjoy government-provided facilities, such as proper assistance for SMEs. Furthermore, Primadhita & Budiningsih (2020) also emphasise that the legality factor greatly influences access to government financing and facilities in assisting SME businesses. However, Humphries et al. (2020) reported that the need for knowledge of government aid programs was most significant among the smallest enterprises. The results of this study emphasise that the legality



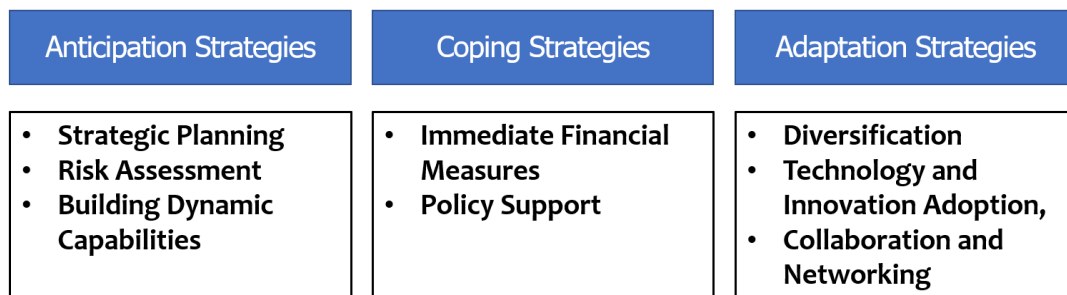
aspect is the main obstacle so that the benefits from SMEs presented in this research cannot be facilitated by SME actors in the Tanjung Bira area.

The findings of this study reveal that strengthening the products of SMTEs is crucial in tourist destinations. This strengthening is associated with product innovation, adequate packaging, and product diversification aligned with customer preferences. Benur & Bramwell (2015) argue that packaging to produce new bundles or combinations of items in destinations, which then become extra new products, is one strategy for product diversification in destinations. Product innovation is related to high-quality marine tourism activities, souvenir products, small food items, and appealing tourist attractions. This study also emphasises that product development is an integral part of product strengthening and diversification, aligned with market demands and competitiveness, as conveyed by Iglesias-sánchez et al. (2017), stating that innovation in tourism products leads to competitiveness for SMEs.

Furthermore, tourism businesses that effectively employed diversification strategies within their sector and expanded their reach across the broader tourism industry were the ones that demonstrated the highest level of sustainability (Dahles, 2018). However, product development is not easy, as SMEs must conduct market research, identify customer needs, and incorporate feedback to enhance product features, performance, and functionality. Collaborating with universities is one characteristic of the product innovation process for SMEs in the context of product development for SMEs, as highlighted by Angelo et al., (2019).

### Mapping Strategies into Duchek’s Model of Resilience

Focusing in the three stages of Duchek Model’s including anticipation, coping and adaptation, the mapping can be seen in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** SMTEs model of resilience strategies

In Duchek's Model, the anticipation stage involves recognizing potential threats and preparing for them. The findings of the study highlight anticipation strategies employed by SMTEs including strategic planning and risk assessment and building dynamic capabilities. Business resilience involves proactive measures like strategic planning and risk assessment. This aligns with the anticipation stage, where enterprises foresee potential crises and develop plans to mitigate their impact. On the other hand, the need to build innovative and dynamic capabilities to gain a competitive advantage is emphasized by allowing SMTEs to be better equipped for future uncertainties.

The coping stage of the model refers to the immediate responses and actions taken to manage and mitigate the impacts of a crisis. The findings outline various coping strategies that SMTEs employed during the COVID-19 pandemic including immediate financial measures and policy support. SMTEs took immediate actions such as postponing investments, reducing labor costs, cutting expenses, and negotiating contracts and terms for instant financial measures. These measures helped manage cash flow and reduce financial strain during the crisis. On the other hand the importance of policy measures like targeted liquidity support or loan guarantees designed for micro-enterprises is highlighted as critical in helping SMTEs cope with the immediate impacts of the pandemic.

The adaptation stage of the model involves long-term changes and transformations that enable organizations to thrive post-crisis including diversification, technology and innovation adoption and collaboration and networking. Diversifying customer bases, products, and markets to reduce vulnerability to specific disruptions is a key strategy found. This diversification helps SMTEs adapt to changing market conditions and enhances resilience. Furthermore, embracing technological advancements and innovative practices, such as adopting digital marketing strategies and online booking systems, is crucial for improving operational efficiency and adapting to new customer preferences. Finally, partnerships or cooperatives with other tourism businesses or organizations for resource sharing and collective responses to challenges is another adaptation strategy.

## Conclusions

This research has identified five strategies employed by the seven SMTEs in Bulukumba Regency's Bira Beach destination to survive and thrive during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The resilience strategies include collaboration between stakeholders in the destinations applying digital marketing as a response to current business trends related to technological development, government intervention related to financial and non-financial support product strengthening and product diversification of SMTEs products, and consolidation of the legality of SMTEs. Collaboration between stakeholders is the most significant strategy. Once a firm collaboration in destination to develop SMTEs is well established, it would be easier to enhance other strategies because all stakeholders have a mutual understanding to develop SMTEs in the same direction. This strategy aims to stimulate growth and enhance competitiveness. The research is limited to informants; therefore, future studies should involve visitors to Bira Beach, Bulukumba Regency, to provide insight and input on the role of SMEs in meeting tourist needs.

Collaboration between stakeholders is the most significant strategy. Once a firm collaboration in destination to develop SMTEs is well established, it would be easier to enhance other strategies because all stakeholders have a mutual understanding to develop SMTEs in the same direction. The study provides recommendations for the government, Tourism Office, and SME Office of Bulukumba Regency to consider in the financial assistance package scheme for SMEs. Additionally, it can serve as input for preparing a sustainable SME development program roadmap. SMEs should also demonstrate willingness and initiative to design innovative products, such as using attractive packaging and product enrichment. SMEs must also consider the health and safety implications of their products throughout the production process, from manufacturing and packaging to sales, to ensure they are clean and safe. Additionally, it is essential to foster collaboration between stakeholders, including the private sector, government, SMEs, tourists, and local communities, to carry out their respective roles and responsibilities effectively.

The Duchek's Model of resilience provides a comprehensive framework for SMTEs to build resilience by focusing on three key stages: anticipation, coping, and adaptation. The anticipation stage involves strategic planning, risk assessment, and building dynamic capabilities to prepare for potential crises. The coping stage includes immediate financial measures and policy support to manage the impacts of a crisis. Finally, the adaptation stage involves long-term changes such as diversification, technology and innovation adoption, and collaboration and networking to enable SMTEs to thrive post-crisis. By adopting this model, SMTEs can enhance their ability to withstand, adapt, and succeed amidst adversity, ensuring long-term sustainability and success in the face of challenges of crises in the future. The practical implications for hospitality managers in the anticipation stage is that they need to develop comprehensive crisis management plans and conduct regular scenario planning exercises, invest in employee training on crisis preparedness and response and establish early warning systems to detect potential threats such as creating a crisis response team and run quarterly simulations of different crisis scenarios. In the coping stage they need to implement flexible operational strategies to quickly adapt to changing conditions, leverage technology to maintain operations and guest services remotely when needed and prioritize clear and frequent communication with staff and guests such as developing a mobile app for contactless check-in/out and in-room services. In the adaptation stage they need to redesign spaces and services to accommodate new health and safety

requirements, diversify revenue streams by exploring new markets or business models and foster a culture of continuous learning and innovation such as converting unused meeting spaces into co-working areas to attract remote workers. The implication for local government in the anticipation stage is that they need to develop destination-wide crisis management protocols in collaboration with industry stakeholders and invest in infrastructure to improve destination resilience such as healthcare and digital connectivity. In the coping stage, they need to provide clear guidelines and support for businesses during crises and facilitate coordination between different sectors such as collaboration in hospitality, healthcare, transportation. In the adaptation stage, the government needs to implement policies to support industry recovery and transformation and invest in destination marketing to rebuild traveler confidence. The implication for marketers in the anticipation stage is that they need to develop crisis communication plans and establish trusted information channels and build strong relationships with media and influencers to aid in crisis messaging. In the coping stage, they need to pivot marketing messages to address traveler concerns and highlight safety measures and leverage digital and social media platforms for real-time updates and engagement. In the adaptation stage, they need to develop campaigns to attract new market segments (e.g. domestic travelers, digital nomads) and emphasize unique local experiences and sustainability initiatives in marketing efforts.

The research was limited to informants who were observed and interviewed. It only focused on SMEs and did not involve visitors. To obtain more accurate and varied information in future research, visitors should be included to provide feedback on the role of SMEs. The research location was also limited to the Tanjung Bira tourist area in Bulukumba Regency, South Sulawesi Province. Therefore, it cannot be used as a general conclusion about the role of SMEs in marine based and coastal regions. Research is needed to involve several leading marine based and coastal tourism areas in Indonesia, such as Bunaken dan Likupang in North Sulawesi, Wakatobi Islands in South East Sulawesi, Raja Ampat in Southwest Papua, Labuang Bajo in Flores (East Nusa Tenggara), Togean Islands in Central Sulawesi and other destinations. Finally, future research could improve crisis management for SMEs resilience by providing more specific and detailed guidelines and standard operating procedures for implementing resilience strategies. Case studies demonstrating the successful implementation of these strategies would allow SMEs to learn from real-life examples and customise strategies according to their context.

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