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The Small Tourism Enterprise Operators' Networking in Dealing with the Changing Business Environment

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ABSTRAK

Kemampuan wirausaha untuk berjejaring sangat penting saat menghadapi gejala bisnis, seperti yang terkena dampak pandemi COVID-19. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis perilaku jaringan pengelola usaha pariwisata kecil (STE) setelah gempa bumi dan selama pandemi COVID-19 di Lombok. Data dikumpulkan dari dua puluh satu pengusaha pariwisata melalui observasi dan wawancara semi-terstruktur, dan dianalisis menggunakan analisis konten. Studi ini mengidentifikasi tiga kategori: pihak yang terlibat dalam jaringan (pengelola pariwisata, otoritas pariwisata, operator transportasi, masyarakat tujuan, dan wisatawan), metode penghubungan (pendekatan jaringan pengelola) dan tujuan kolaborasi (tujuan jaringan pengelola). Setelah gempa bumi (ketika turbulensi bisnis masih belum begitu intens), pengelola STE menggunakan kontak fisik langsung, media sosial, dan mitra online untuk memperluas jaringan mereka, mengembangkan lebih banyak kerjasama (daripada kolaborasi) guna menciptakan manfaat pertukaran sosial. Selama pandemi COVID-19 (ketika turbulensi bisnis lebih intens), pengelola STE meningkatkan penggunaan media sosial untuk memperdalam jaringan dan berfokus pada pengembangan kolaborasi dengan sejumlah terbatas mitra guna memperoleh manfaat pertukaran ekonomi. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan intervensi pemerintah setempat dalam meningkatkan kemampuan jaringan pengelola STE dan membangun jaringan berbasis online.

ABSTRACT

The entrepreneur's ability to networking is particularly critical when dealing with business turbulence, such as that affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. This study aims to analyze the STE operators manage their networks during the changing business environment affected by earthquake and COVID-19 pandemic in Lombok. Data was collected from twenty-one tourism entrepreneurs through semi-structured observations and interviews, and analyzed using content analysis. The study identifies three categories: parties involved in the network (tourism managers, tourism authorities, transport operators, destination communities, and tourists), linking methods (management network approach) and collaboration objectives (management network objectives). After the earthquake (when business turbulence was still not so intense), STE managers used direct physical contact, social media, and online partners to expand their networks, developing more cooperation (rather than collaboration) to create social exchange benefits. During the COVID-19 pandemic (when business turbulence was more intense), STE managers increased their use of social media to deepen their networks and focused on developing collaborations with a limited number of partners to reap the benefits of economic exchange. This study recommends local government intervention in improving the ability of STE management networks and building online-based networks.

1. INTRODUCTION

Networking is vital for small tourism enterprises (Turkina, 2018; Zhang & Zhang, 2018). Previous research contended that networking attempts to achieve a specific goal and particular behaviors to help in working (Porter & Woo, 2015). In many studies that an entrepreneur's network was found a critical resource for the success of a small tourism business (Dickinson et al., 2017; Stoddart et al., 2020; Xi et al., 2021; Zhang & Zhang, 2018). Networking undoubtedly helps entrepreneurs find business opportunities,

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start up a business, and deal with business uncertainty, develop business resilience and quick recovery from the crisis and sustain their business and communities (Engel et al., 2017; Zhang & Zhang, 2018). Personal and social networks can help entrepreneurs create *social exchange* and *economic exchange* (Elvekrok et al., 2022; Porter & Woo, 2015). Through which the entrepreneurs gain business knowledge to create innovation and develop business competencies, which ultimately contribute to the sustainable development of the destination where the enterprise reside (Elvekrok et al., 2022; Mottiar, 2016; Rodriguez-Sanchez et al., 2019; Tang et al., 2020; Tasci et al., 2019; Zhang & Zhang, 2018).

Previous research stated that networking actions are about *broadening* and/or *deepening* relationships with the alters (Vissa, 2012). An entrepreneur can either broaden (increase the number of networks with new partners) or deepen (intensify relationships with the existing partners) when needed. Yet, the success of the network is reliant on the entrepreneurs' efforts to make their relationships meaningful and beneficial for their business (Casanueva et al., 2016; Turkina, 2018). Some entrepreneurs may develop complex, extensive, and diverse networks to obtain support, while some others find the success of a network in not on the number of partners but in whom they work with (Bensaou et al., 2014; Mottiar, 2016; Sulhaini et al., 2023; Turkina et al., 2016). The entrepreneurs should have knowledge of the partners' sociocultural characteristics and an effective communication approach (Karampela et al., 2019; Porter & Woo, 2015). Some business partners may prefer online communication while others enjoy direct communication (Capriello & Riboldazzi, 2020; Dickinson et al., 2017; Karampela et al., 2019; Williams et al., 2017). For example, previous research found that in dealing with local communities with negative stereotypes of tourists, the tourism entrepreneurs should know the key persons (Mkono, 2016; Pratt et al., 2013). In such a condition, having a good informal relationship with *local informal leader* and making direct communication with local communities helped the STE's operators gain support for local resources and business security.

The entrepreneur's ability to networking is particularly critical when dealing with business turbulence, such as that affected by the COVID-19 pandemic (Dickinson et al., 2017; Engel et al., 2017; Rodriguez-Sanchez et al., 2019). The COVID-19 created devastating impacts on tourism industry worldwide, and imposed many countries to provide financial aids to prevent their tourism industry from sharp decline (Collins-Kreiner & Ram, 2020; Gössling et al., 2020). For example, previous research reported that the first three months of the COVID-19 outbreak created over 170 thousand cancellations of hotel room bookings and caused a loss of more than RM 68 million revenue in Malaysia (Foo et al., 2021). This compelled the Malaysian Government to provide financial supports in order to avoid a deeper decline. Similarly, Indonesian Government had to provide financial support to the vulnerable workers from the COVID-19 impacts, particularly the female, young and low-education workers (Sugihamretha, 2020; Sun et al., 2021). The decline in 100,000 tourist arrivals when the COVID-19 outbreak created the economic shock by the drop of 0.46 bn US\$ of the world GDP contributed by travel and tourism industry, and resulted in 14 million job positions abandoned (Škare et al., 2021; Sugihamretha, 2020). Specifically, previous research informed that the COVID-19 decreased tourist visit to India up to 68% from January to March 2020, and diminishing the foreign exchange earnings contributed by tourism industry from 268 bn \$ in 2019 to about 1.7 bn \$ in 2020 (Jaipuria et al., 2021). Furthermore, the COVID-19 impacts resulted in the closure of many small tourism enterprises in China, and shifting tourist's behaviour in the South Korea (Li et al., 2022). The local tourists shifted from inland destinations to spacious beaches, and visited a low-density destination in order to avoid the infectious disease (Donaire et al., 2021; Jeon & Yang, 2021).

In Lombok, the business turbulence commenced before the COVID-19 outbreak. Lombok was struck by earthquake in the mid-2018, devastating a number of tourist facilities, and claimed hundreds of lives (Kurniasari et al., 2021; Sulhaini et al., 2023). The loss of tourism facilities including hotels and homestays was estimated reaching US\$ 5.7 million, and tourist visitation fell by 25% (Adha, 2019; Wulandari et al., 2019). Despite a quick recovery in 2019, the tourism industry was deteriorated by the outbreak of the COVID-19 in Indonesia since March 2020, causing the tourist visitation plummeted again. The natural disaster and COVID-19 pandemic created business turbulence and crisis (Gössling et al., 2020; Peñarroya-Farell & Miralles, 2022). The crisis changed tourist's behaviours and intensified business uncertainty, particularly for the STE operators (Jeon & Yang, 2021; Li et al., 2022; Mkono, 2016; Sulhaini et al., 2023). Hence, the entrepreneurs should have an effective networking strategy to manage their business operated (Elvekrok et al., 2022; Engel et al., 2017; Jeon & Yang, 2021; Li et al., 2022; Pratt et al., 2013; Skokic et al., 2019). Therefore, it is critical to understand the STE operators' networking in facing the crisis.

Despite many studies elaborate tourism entrepreneurs' networks, the STE operators' networking behaviour is still unclear, particularly when dealing with the business turbulence (Engel et al., 2017; Pan et al., 2021; Porter & Woo, 2015; Skokic et al., 2019). As a result, we have limited knowledge of the STE operators' networking actions during the crisis. Therefore, in the context of Lombok, this longitudinal study

aims to analyze the STE operators manage their networks during the changing business environment affected by earthquake and COVID-19 pandemic.

2. METHODS

This longitudinal study employed qualitative methods, particularly explanatory case study, in order to allow analysis on the experience of subjects in the changing environment. Purposive sampling technique was adopted to recruit informants from within the managers and owners of small tourism enterprises located at five main tourist destinations in Lombok, including Senggigi, Narmada, Mataram, Tete Batu, and Kuta as shown in Figure 1. Following the thematic nature of the qualitative research, data collection was not based on the number of the informants but, on data saturation. Data gained saturation after 21 informants, as listed in Table 1, involved in the interviews.

Data were collected and analyzed in two phases: the first phase was after the Lombok earthquake and the second one was during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the first phase, data was collected twice using *observation* and *in-depth semi-structured interview*. Observation and interviewees were initially made in October and November 2018, and continued from July to September 2019. The interviews lasted from 45 to 120 minutes. Each interview was recorded and written into transcripts for a further analysis. In the second phase, data was collected from July to December 2020 using online interviews. The questions were repeating the ones asked in the first phase, with emphasis made on how STE operators manage their business networking during the pandemic COVID-19.



Figure 1. Lombok Map with Research Location

Table 1. The Informant Details

No.	Pseudonym	Location	Enterprise type
1	Ayu	Narmada	Homestay
2	Lanang	Narmada	Non star hotel
3	Ida	Narmada	Homestay
4	Dudi	Narmada	Homestay
5	Jati	Narmada	Non star hotel
6	Tepi	Narmada	Non star hotel
7	Koming	Narmada	Botanic Garden dan Restaurant
8	Sam	Kuta	Non star hotel
9	Nila	Kuta	Homestay
10	Yua	Kuta	Homestay and restaurant
11	Andi	Kuta	Café and Restaurant
12	Aida Jawa	Kuta	Café
13	Zahra	Mataram	Travel agent
14	Jaki	Mataram	Homestay
15	Iwak	Senggigi	Homestay
16	Zico	Senggigi	Travel agent
17	Kahar	Senggigi	Restaurant and Travel agent
18	Tudung	Senggigi	Non star hotel and restaurant
19	Basar	Senggigi	Online travel agent
20	Romi	Tete batu	Homestay
21	Mulya	Tete batu	Homestay

Data was analyzed using *content analysis*. The coding process was incepted by analyzing words, phrases and sentences in the transcripts. The purpose was to develop categories inductively. The sentences were condensed and fragmented into chunks of data. The main idea and topic in the condensed sentences were evaluated and interpreted. Each main idea was named as 'concept'. In doing so, researchers made 'theoretical comparison' linking the concepts with the literature. The concepts were counted for its frequencies. Hundreds of concepts emerged to form the ten themes which is presented in [Table 2](#). The ten themes were further grouped into three categories, elaborating the networking behaviour of the STE operators in Lombok.

Table 2. Frequency of the Emergent Themes that Build the Categories

Categories	Themes	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Network Alters	Tourism operators	114	16
	Tourism authority	54	7
	Transport operator	92	13
	Destination communities	38	5
	Tourists	36	5
Linking-Up	Physical contact	62	9
	Using social media	70	10
Teaming-Up	Partnering online agent	78	11
	Cooperative relationship	66	9
Total Frequency	Collaborative relationship	112	16
		722	100

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results

Data analysis resulted in three main categories including: (1) *Network alters*; (2) *Linking-up*; and (3) *Teaming-up*, as as depicted in [Figure 2](#). Detail findings were elaborated below:

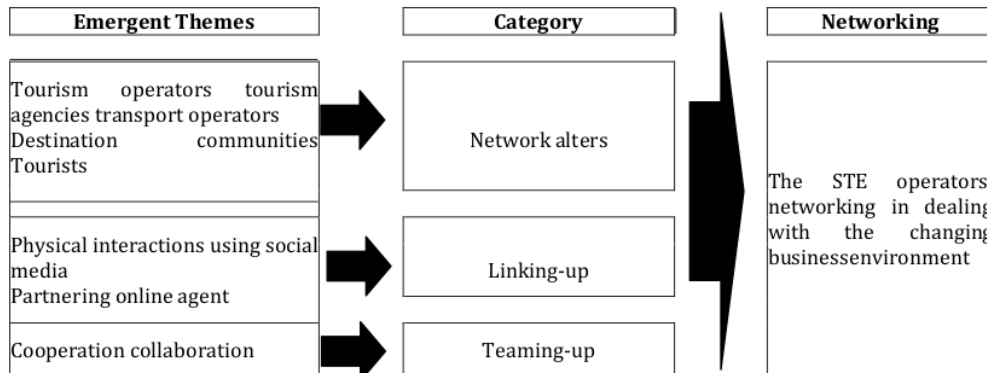


Figure 2. The Emergent Themes and Categories Elaborating the Networking of Local STE Operators in Dealing with the Changing Business Environment

Category I. Network Alters

The category of 'network alters' related to the STE operators's business partners. As shown in [Figure 2](#), the network alters category was derived from five emerging themes including the tourism operators, tourism agencies, transport operators, destination communities, and tourists. Tourism operators referred to the STE operator's business partners, including the operators and/or owners of small hotels, restaurants, travel agencies and souvenir shops. After the earthquake, the STE operators extended and intensified their networks with all of their partners. An informant's statement on this matter can be seen at [Table 3](#). The partners helped the operators, such as Zico, to focus on the short-term business recovery including disaster mitigation, and trauma healing, and shared the news with their friends. During the COVID-19 pandemic all tourist destinations temporarily closed. Some STE operators managed business relationship only with local partners, while some others shifted into other jobs. An informant's statement on this matter can be seen at [Table 3](#). Shifting jobs temporarily, as experienced by Basar, was possible as

they were supported by their existing networks: the benefits of having many personal relationship (Casaneuva et al., 2016; Elvekrok et al., 2022; Skokic et al., 2019).

Table 3. Informant Statement on the Tourism Operators's Theme in Category Network Alters

Emergent Themes	Informant Statement
Tourism Operators	"... we informed all partners that destination management was improved, damaged tourist facilities were restored quickly, and we are prepared to deal with disasters." (Zico) "...during this pandemic...my wife sells foods online and I provide delivery... I mainly receive orders from my friends". (Basar)

Tourism agencies connected with the governmental departments such as the Tourism Department, Industry and Trade Department, and Public Works Department, some of which that have policies related to tourism development. After the earthquake, many STE operators expected financial support from the tourism agencies. An informant's statement on this matter can be seen at Table 4. Yet, only the operators who had close relationship with the individual officers obtained the financial support. During the COVID-19 pandemic, most STE operators intensified relationship with the tourism agencies. An informant's statement on this matter can be seen at Table 4. In addition, the operator's intention was to obtain information about the health protocol and the business conduct during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 4. Informant Statement on the Tourism Agencies's Theme in Category Network Alters

Emergent Themes	Statement and Informant
Tourism Agencies	"We also need financial support to buy towels, standard linen and beds...." (Romi) "I was assigned by the tourism officer to distribute some money and food for the employees who temporarily laid off...." (Kahar)

Transport operators related to taxi drivers (Grab, BlueBird and local taxis) and Gojek (mainly motorbike operator). After the earthquake the STE operators made the transport operators their main partners. An informant's statement on this matter can be seen at Table 5. Furthermore, the STE operators' personal characteristics such as friendly, sociable, honest and having strong friendship bond, helped strengthen networks with the transportation operators. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the STE operators mainly maintained their networks with motorcycle operators. An informant's statement on this matter can be seen at Table 5. Also, because the motorbike was the only transport mode allowed to operate during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 5. Informant Statement on the Transport Operator's Theme in Category Network Alters

Emergent Themes	Statement and Informant
Transport Operators	"I leave my brochure with the taxi drivers and motorcycle operators... usually they bring us guests.... we give them a commission directly according to the number of guests" (Jati) "...fortunately, I work together with some motorbike operators for my products delivery. So far, all orders arrive on time...and cheaper than delivering by taxi" (Andi)

Destination communities, referred to three community groups: (1) the social media players, consisting of young people from the millennial generation; (2) local endorsers (local singers and fashion models); and (3) the local informal associations. After the earthquake, the social media players helped the STE operators conduct online promotions and provided their E-WOM. The local endorsers helped with offline and online promotions to local communities. Meanwhile, the local informal associations helped with trauma healing. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the STE operators-maintained networks only with the social media players. An informant's statement on this matter can be seen at Table 6. The network with the social media players enabled the STE operators, such as Bazaar to generate income during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 6. Informant Statement on the Destination Community's Theme in Category Network Alters

Emergent Themes	Statement and Informant
Destination Communities	"I sell packaged Etawa goat's milk online and offline. Some brothers helped promote through social media... I feel lucky to have many friends" (Basar)

Tourists, represented local, domestic, and international tourists who buy the STE operators' products. After the earthquake, most of STE operators formed networks with all groups of tourists. An informant's statement on this matter can be seen at Table 7. The *friend-tourists* helped the STE operators to broaden the scope of their social networks and the spread of information about Lombok, as the tourists have their social community and particular way of communication among themselves, enabling the eWOM (electronic Word of Mouth) to spread quickly among the tourists (Dickinson et al., 2017; Pan et al., 2021; Williams et al., 2017). During the COVID-19 pandemic, several STE operators-maintained communication with their *friend-tourists*, but only intensified the networks with the local partners. An informant's statement on this matter can be seen at Table 7. The pandemic changed the market of some operators, such as Iwak, and led them to intensify networks with local partners using online communication means.

Table 7. Informant Statement on the Tourist's Theme in Category Network Alters

Emergent Themes	Statement and Informant
Tourists	"I have hundreds of "friend-tourists" local and abroad.... We have a backpacker community on Facebook. When I add information about Lombok, it becomes a topic of discussion among them" (Romi) "I am promoting my homestay for 'staycation' and 'self-isolation' place on Whaatsaap and Instagram. I contact some friends at the Health Department and I also make promotion at other Whaatsaap groups" (Iwak)

Category 2. Linking-Up

The term *linking-up* signified the STE operators' attempts in developing networks. The STE operators linked-up with their partners through three mechanisms: *physical interaction*; *using social media*; and, *partnering online agent*. After the earthquake, most STE operators developed networks through direct *physical interaction*, where they communicated directly face to face. The *physical interactions* were mainly adopted by the STE operators in pursuing close relationship with tourists. An informant expressed: "I don't have website ... we mainly pursue the tourists who pass by our restaurant" (Yua). The use of physical interactions indicated the smallness of the enterprise which is mainly reliant on the entrepreneur's personal networking. Furthermore, some STE operators developed their networks using *social media* and *partnering online agent partner*. The use of online media-based networks enabled the STE operators to penetrate the domestic and international tourism market and maintained relationships with the tourists post visit. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the lockdown and strict health protocols resulted in the geographical activity restrictions. As a result, the STE operators increasingly used the online media in communicating with their existing partners. An informant expressed: "...during this pandemic, I can only offer my homestay on Instagram and Facebook. I also promote my staycation package via WhatsApp, because right now we can only hope from local guests" (Ida). The operators, such as Ida, experienced the increasing use of the online media to link with the limited number of local partners.

Category 3. Teaming-Up

The term *teaming-up* signified two main emergent themes: *cooperation* and *collaboration*. The theme 'cooperation' was used to indicate the STE operators' networking goals to increase knowledge and business competence. Meanwhile, the theme 'collaboration' was used to describe the operators' networking intention to generate income. After the earthquake, the STE operators cooperated with all partners. They cooperated with the local partners to exchange information about the short-term business recovery including trauma mitigation, and promoted Lombok post the disaster. The STE operators cooperated with the tourism agencies to increase business resilience through empowerment programs. Also, the STE operators cooperated with the national and international partners, particularly the *friend-tourists*, to help spread information about image of Lombok as a beautiful tourist destination worldwide.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the STE operators cooperated to exchange information about health protocols, online marketing workshops, and job opportunities. An informant's statement on this matter can be seen at Table 8. Thus, such cooperation helped the STE operators discover new business opportunities apart from the tourism business. After the earthquake, the STE operators developed two types of collaboration, *short-term (temporary) collaboration* and *long-term (sustainable) collaboration*. The

operators developed *temporary collaboration* to generate income. An informant's statement on this matter can be seen at Table 8. The *temporary collaboration* was mainly settled on cash basis, following the social rules that commonly accepted by all tourism stakeholders. Meanwhile, the operators developed the *sustainable collaboration* to sustain the relationship. An informant's statement on this matter can be seen at Table 8. The STE operators, such as Zahra, developed such collaboration aiming the continuing relationship that help create future income. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the lockdown resulted in the closure of most tourist destinations. Yet, such condition stimulated the creation of new products by some STE operators. An informant's statement on this matter can be seen at Table 8. The confined networking environment, as experienced by Mulya, stimulated innovative actions to create new products and induced the STE operators to become proficient at the online-based communication media.

Table 8. Informant Statement on the Cooperation and Collaboration's Theme in Category Teaming-Up

Emergent Themes	Statement and Informant
Cooperation	"I discussed with some friends through whatsapp group about how to raise laying hens.... my side jobs while waiting for this industry to recover." (Ziko) "We collaborate with tour guides. They bring us guests.. We provide some fees for the guides to secure our business" (Tudung)
Collaboration	"We made the prices lower on tour packages to help other operators to rise. It's okay not to take profit to attract the guests first" (Zahra) "The Health Department choose my homestay as the isolation area for the moderate covid patients. I am happy to do that as I can help others, and I can earn some money" (Mulya)

Three categories emerged from the study elaborating the STE operators' networking behaviour in managing their networks during the changing business environment in tourism, including *network alters*, *linking-up*, and, *teaming-up*. The findings were depicted in Table 9.

Table 9. The STE Operators' Networking in the Changing Environment

The Changing Environment	Managing the Network	Network Alters					
		Tour Operator	Tourism Agencies	Transport Operator	Destination Communities	Tourists	
Earth quake (Creating less intense turbulence and lower level of uncertainty)	<i>Linking-up:</i>						
	Physical interaction		X	X	X	X	X
	Social media		X	X	X	X	X
	Partnering online agent		-	X	-	-	-
	<i>Teaming up:</i>						
	Cooperation		X	X	X	X	X
Broadening networking	Collaboration		X	-	X	-	X
	Social exchange		X	X	X	X	X
	Economic exchange		X		X	-	X
	<i>Linking -up:</i>						
COVID-19 Pandemic (Creating more intense turbulence and higher level of uncertainty)	Physical interaction		-	-	-	-	-
	Social media		X	X	X	X	X
	Partnering online agent		-	-	-	-	-
	<i>Teaming-up:</i>						
	Cooperation		-	X	-	X	-
	Collaboration		X	X	X	X	X
Deepening networking	Social exchange		-	X	-	X	-
	Economic exchange		X	X	X	X	X

Discussion

First, *network alters*. This category signified the partner groups whom the STE operators developed network with during the changing environment. According previous research regarding the network constituents representing the tourism stakeholders, this study found that the network alters consisted of five groups of tourism stakeholders including tour operator, tourism agencies, transport operator, destination communities and tourists (Hysa et al., 2021; Zhang & Zhang, 2018). The current study found

that the STE operators tended to develop networks with as many possible constituents worldwide after the earthquake. Extended a knowledge regarding broadening and deepening network actions, other research stated that the operators tended to maintain network with a limited number of constituents during the COVID-19 (Pollack et al., 2016; Vissa, 2012). The findings suggested that the network broadening actions were implemented by the STE operators when dealing with the lower intense business uncertainty (after the earthquake). Meanwhile, the deepening actions were adopted to go through the high intense business uncertainty (during the COVID-19 pandemic).

Second, *linking-up*. The STE operators *linked-up* with the network alters through three main approaches: *physical interactions*, *social media*, and *partnering online agent*, depending on the location and the type of networking activities. The findings were in line with similar research which stated that the use of different approaches by the STE operators in *linking-up* with their partners indicated their knowledge of the characteristics of their partners (Porter & Woo, 2015; Westaby et al., 2014). The finding also confirmed previous research regarding the use of different networking approach in response to the the context where the partnership operates (Czernek-Marszałek, 2018).

The findings showed that linking-up through *physical interactions* enabled the STE operator to develop informal relationship and gain trust from their *friend-tourists*. Such type of relationship helped them benefit from the positive words of mouth of the tourists. Similar research suggested that networks are critical, particularly the informal networks (Karampela et al., 2019). It was evident that the ability of STE operators to manage personal relationships with other tourism partners, help their businesses survived during the changing business environment. The finding was in line with similar research which stated that the STE operators' informal network helped gain supporting resources to overcome barriers and keep the enterprises operated during the turbulent environment (Coles et al., 2021; Skokic et al., 2019).

The STE operators employed *the social media* and *partnering online agent* to develop networks worldwide after the earthquake, and maintained relationship with the existing partners during the COVID-19 pandemic. The use of online media during the COVID-19 pandemic enabled the STE operators to make frequent contact with their *friend tourists*, exchange information and sell products despite the outdoor activity restriction. The online communication helped the STE operators pass information faster, wider and effectively reached the target. The findings confirmed previous research regarding the use of technology the homestay operators to keep network relationality with tourists (Ammar, 2021; Marques & Gondim Matos, 2020). The findings were also consistent with other research on the subject of entrepreneur's ability to reach the target effectively using online media in the context of Airbnb and concerning to the use of online media for making frequent contact with tourists to know the tourists' needs (Murti & Darma, 2021; Xi et al., 2021; Zhang & Zhang, 2018). Furthermore, the findings support previous research regarding the use of online media to form an online social community and support the sustainable tourism marketing (Dickinson et al., 2017; Hysa et al., 2021).

Third, the *teaming-up* category elucidated the STE operators' two main networking aims: *cooperation* and *collaboration*. The STE operators developed cooperation to increase their business competence and ability to develop the destination. They also developed long-term and short-term collaboration. The long-term collaboration was intended to secure the future income generation from a partnership, while the short-term collaboration was used to gain immediate income from a partnership. such cooperative and collaborative networks enable the STE operators to recover quickly after the earthquake.

The finding was coherent with previous research regarding the effects of networks to business and destination development (Elvekrok et al., 2022; Van der Zee & Vanneste, 2015). According to the authors, partnerships that helped generate and increase income (collaboration) have positive impacts to business. Meanwhile the relationship that result in the increasing knowledge to improve customer satisfaction (cooperation) contribute to the destination development. The findings also elaborated similar research regarding the social and economic exchange benefits from networking (Porter & Woo, 2015; Vissa, 2012). The authors suggested that networking interactions can result in either *social exchange* benefits, such as those generated through cooperation in the current study, or *economic exchange* benefits, such as those gained from collaboration. Furthermore, the short and *temporary collaboration* creates fleeting bond between the parties as it is built only when there is an opportunity to generate income (Comunian, 2017; Porter & Woo, 2015). Meanwhile in the long term, *the collaboration* was intended to create the future income which also help create the *social exchange*.

The findings contributed to the literature by contextualising the other study regarding the *social exchange* and *economic exchange* benefits into the changing business environment (Lioukas & Reuer, 2015; Porter & Woo, 2015). The findings suggested that in a lower level of business uncertainty, the entrepreneurs tended to develop cooperative networks and create the *social exchange* benefits. Meanwhile, in a higher

level of business uncertainty, the entrepreneurs tended to develop collaborative networks to gain the benefits of *economic exchange* in order to survive.

The current study suggested some implications for tourism policies and the future research. To increase the STE operators' networking ability, the local government can provide empowerment programs. For example, the local government can facilitate a regular foreign language course, particularly English. The government can also organize seminar and workshops on information technology to help the STE operators use the communication technology and content creation. Furthermore, as the current research context is unique for Lombok, it may need adjustment when adopted for other destinations. As data was collected post-earthquake and during the COVID-19 pandemic, the analysis may exclude a much less issues that create the uncertain business condition where the STE operators mainly develop and manage their networking. It is imperative to continue the study on dealing with business turbulence affected by other issues such as political issues, business competition and other global issues.

4. CONCLUSION

The study highlighted the importance of the STE operators' informal networks to deal with turbulent business environment. In a lower level of business turbulence (after the earthquake), the STE operators were able to broaden their networks with all groups of alters and create the *social exchanges* to sustain the networks and develop the image of the destination. Meanwhile during the pandemic COVID-19, the STE operators increased the use of technology as communication means and deepened their networks with a limited number of partners. The operators focused on gaining the *economic exchange* benefits in order keep their businesses operated. The current study suggested some implications for tourism policies and the future research. To increase the STE operators' networking ability, the local government can provide empowerment programs. For example, the local government can facilitate a regular foreign language course, particularly English. The government can also organize seminar and workshops on information technology to help the STE operators use the communication technology and content creation. Furthermore, as the current research context is unique for Lombok, it may need adjustment when adopted for other destinations. As data was collected post-earthquake and during the COVID-19 pandemic, the analysis may exclude a much less issues that create the uncertain business condition where the STE operators mainly develop and manage their networking. It is imperative to continue the study on dealing with business turbulence affected by other issues such as political issues, business competition and other global issues.

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The small tourism enterprise operators' networking in dealing with the changing business environment

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FINAL GRADE

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GENERAL COMMENTS

Instructor

PAGE 1

PAGE 2

PAGE 3

PAGE 4

PAGE 5

PAGE 6

PAGE 7

PAGE 8

PAGE 9

PAGE 10

PAGE 11
