

# SURVIVING COVID: PURSUING A VISION OR PRACTICALITY?

## **TAB: A case study**

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# INTRODUCTION

- Covid-19 hit the hospitality industry in Singapore with a decline in visitor arrivals by 85.7% and **tourism receipts by 78.4%** in the first three quarters of 2020.
- SME owner-managers are **particularly hard hit**
  - SMEs are enterprises with an annual turnover of no more than S\$100 million and up to 200 workers. **99% of Singapore companies are SME companies** (Phua, 12 June 2020).
  - SME turnover expectations fell **17.90% to 3.67**. Retail/F&B declined 2.74% to 3.91 while other sectors saw double-digit % declines (Singapore Business Federation, 25 September 2020)
- This study **extends Alonso et. al.'s (2020) study** on the **impact of Covid-19** on **SME owner-managers** in the **hospitality industry globally** (Argentina, Australia, Bolivia, Greece, Italy, Malaysia, Spain, UK) to **Singapore**.
- This case study seeks to understand **three aspects of riding the Covid-19 wave** from the perspective of an **SME owner-manager**.

# FOCUS OF THE RESEARCH

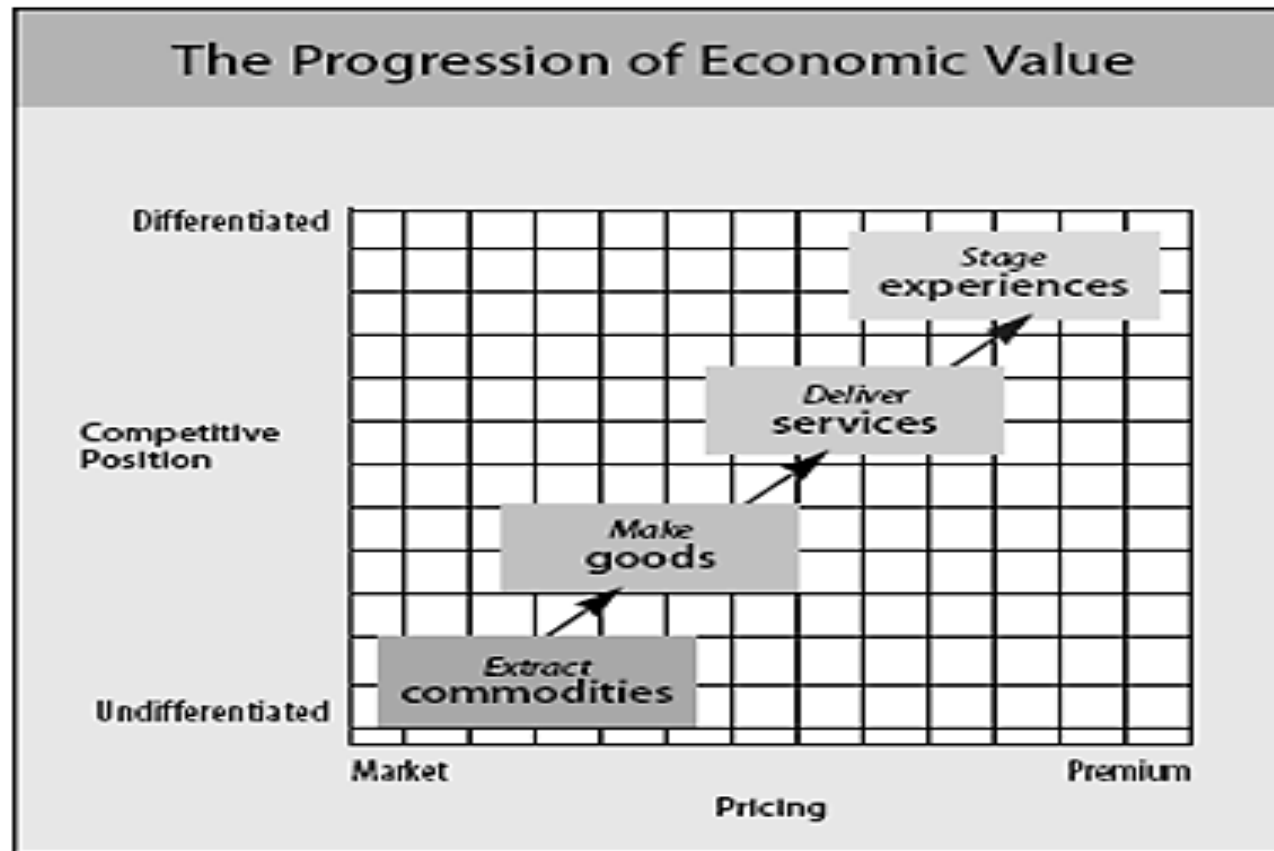
Research questions:

- 1) What are the **key concerns** of an SME owner-manager in the hospitality industry?
- 2) What were the **coping strategies** used to address these concerns?
- 3) What were the **adjusting strategies** used to cope with these concerns?

Significance of the case study:

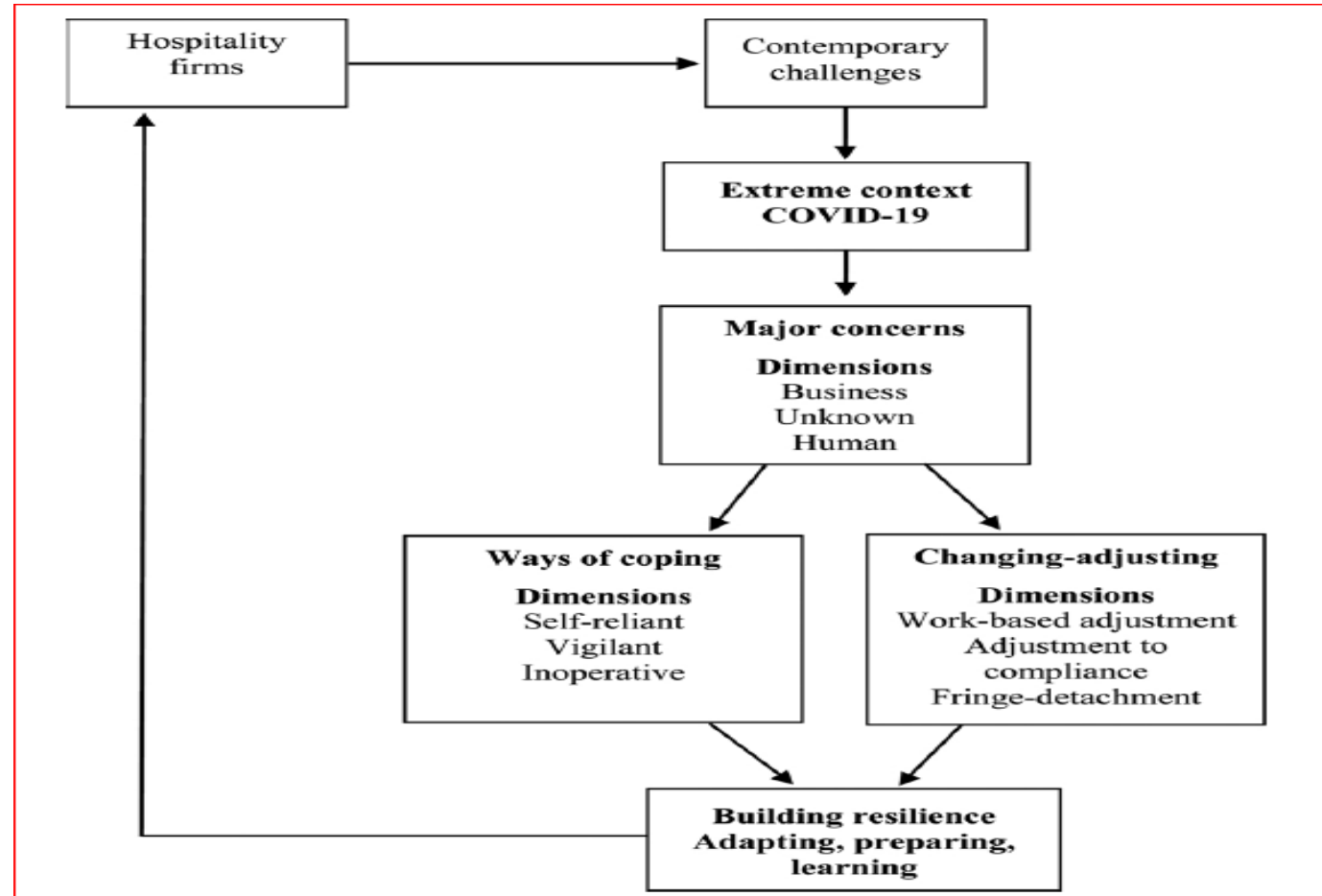
- 1) **Knowledge sharing** among SMEs in the hospitality industry
- 2) Shared resources for post-Covid 19 **recovery planning** and **implementation**

# LITERATURE REVIEW



- The purpose of a consumption project is to **generate an experience** (Andersson, 2007).
- 4 **realms of experience** – passive participation, absorption, active participation, immersion, (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Consumers are willing to pay a **premium** for **differentiated** experiences.

# LITERATURE REVIEW



Alonso et. al.'s (2020) framework for understanding concerns, coping and adjusting strategies of SME owner-managers facing Covid-19

# METHODOLOGY

- Case study – **owner-manager's** viewpoints (identify enablers and barriers), primary emphasis on application to hospitality industry across SME companies rather than theoretical commentaries
- Data collection
  - **Inclusion criteria:** Owner-manager of SME associated with hospitality industry for at least 3 years.
  - The owner-manager has recruited SIT interns once before
  - Approached to write case and he agreed. Interviewed, wrote draft of case study together.
- Data analysis
  - Interview transcribed and **themes identified** in response to research questions

# RESULTS

## Case Profile of Greg Yap

- Passionate in the **hospitality and event industry**
- Double degree in **Hospitality** and **Meeting and Events Management** (UNLV)
- **Experiences:**
  - **F&B** and **event** management experience in special dining and cocktail events
  - International luxury 5-star **hotel's** sales and marketing team
  - National **tourism** board where he attract, develop and grow local MICE industry
- **Identified gaps and opportunities** in corporate event planning in the digital age.
- Founded Tab Group Private Limited (“**TAB**”) in 2019

# TAB GROUP PRIVATE LIMITED

## Mission

To connect people and create memorable experiences

Focus on corporate B2B clients

A one-stop solution to create unique event experiences TAB's platform.

Choose from a selection of curated experiences.



## Unique selling point

Catering to small group events max 30 persons.

Seamless online event platform from planning, purchase, to execution.  
Hassle Free

Helping customers achieve their purpose for an event while maintaining the human touch

Vendors are selected by invitation to co-create a unique experiences for their customers



# KEY CONCERNS DURING COVID-19



## Business

- Impact of **COVID-19 hit in March 2020**
- **TAB's Revenue** fell by over 80%
- **Circuit Breaker** started on April 7, 2020.



## Customers & Vendors

- Customers –
  - **Refund** policy
  - **Staying engaged** with relevant content
- Vendors –
  - **Supporting vendors** to update
  - **Adapt listings** to meet government guidelines



## Business Crossroads

- **To rebrand** product and broaden market for consumers and special events.
- **Remain committed to** the core vision and mission, offering **TAB's solution to a niche market.**

# COPING STRATEGIES (SELF-RELIANCE)

## 1. TALK TO YOUR CUSTOMERS AND FIND OUT WHAT THEY NEED

- Conversation with his customers
- Insight gained was that it was possible to stay true to TAB's mission of offering a shared common experience event virtually with an added tangible physical element that bridges the gap of virtual events.
- Virtual Experiences with a Difference

## 2. ADAPT QUICKLY TO SOLVE NEW PROBLEMS

- TAB insights of challenges faced when organising virtual group lunches or meals for 20 or 30 people.
- TAB quickly adapted their existing Event Tool feature on the platform:
  - e-invitations to RSVP,
  - delivery addresses and dietary preferences
  - direct to the restaurant/vendor,
- Event Management for Virtual Experiences

# ADJUSTING STRATEGIES DURING AND AFTER COVID-19

## Work-based adjustments

- Adapted to a **completely digital on-boarding process** for vendors
- **Implemented a virtual chat system** to ensure quick and immediate response to customers

## Adjustments to compliance

- **Ensured business is kept up to date of** the evolving situation and operating within the boundaries of **the government's Safe Events Framework** and other COVID-19 guidelines

## Fringe detachment

- Covid-19 will change the events industry - there is a need to **continue developing Virtual and Hybrid Experiences;**
- **Changing trend away from mass gatherings,** to continue focus of curating small group experiences up to 30 persons

# DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

## Discussion:

- Findings were **similar** to those of Alonso et al's (2020) study at the global level
- **Key concerns** – Impact on workers, revenue, market demand, preference of customers, the unknown (Davahli et al, 2020)

**Limitations of study:** Small sample size

## Implications for future research:

Do more interviews with other SME owner-managers and **pool knowledge** on coping and adjusting strategies in dealing with epidemics/crisis in the hospitality industry, and perhaps in other industries greatly impacted by Covid-19

## Implications for practitioners:

This reflects the value of **knowledge and community building**. Things will not return to pre-Covid status. We need to move on using the strategies shared for the benefit of all.

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