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Leveraging intersections in management theory and practice

10-11 June 2021

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Full Papers

edited by

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To the reader,

this volume contains the *full papers* of the Sinergie-SIMA 2021 Management Conference, hosted online by the University of Palermo on 10-11 June 2021.

The legitimacy of management scholars in society increasingly rests on their ability to create social and economic value by finding solutions and offering effective and timely guidance to decision makers in firms and institutions. This is especially true in face of the extraordinary economic, societal, health and environmental challenges that firms and governments are currently facing worldwide, also as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The purpose of the Conference was to discuss about the enhancement of the intersections between theory and managerial practice, calling attention to the many challenges to which impactful studies about the most challenging aspects firms and managers are tackling today need to provide an answer.

These challenges encompass the bridging of different disciplines, theories, methods, levels of analysis and, in particular, the intersections between theory and practice.

The Conference call for papers gave the opportunity to submit either an *extended abstract* or a *full paper*. Overall, the editorial staff received 114 *extended abstracts* and 52 *full papers*.

For the *extended abstracts*, the evaluation of the submissions was carried out by the Conference Chairs and the Scientific Committee, on the basis of their consistency with the Conference topic and/or with management studies, according to SIMA Thematic Groups. The clarity and (even potential) relevance of the contributions were evaluated, as well.

For the *full papers*, the evaluation followed the peer review process, with a double-blind review performed by two referees - university lecturers, expert about the topic - selected among SIMA and the community of Sinergie members.

In detail, the referees applied the following criteria to evaluate the submissions:

- clarity of the research aims,
- accuracy of the methodological approach,
- consistency of the contents with the Conference topic/tracks and/or with management studies,
- contribution in terms of originality/innovativeness,
- relevance in relation to the Conference topic/tracks and/or with management studies,
- clarity of communication,
- significance of the bibliographical basis.

The *peer review* process resulted in full acceptance, acceptance with revisions or rejection of the submissions. In the case of disagreement among reviewers' evaluations, the decision was taken by the Conference Chairs. Each work was then sent back to the Authors together with the referees' reports to make the revisions suggested by the referees.

The evaluation process ended with the acceptance of 42 *full papers* and 107 *extended abstracts*, which were published in two distinct volumes.

All the *full papers* published in this volume were presented and discussed during the Conference and published online on the web portal of Sinergie journal (www.sijm.it).

While thanking all the Authors, Chairs and participants, we hope that this volume will contribute to advance knowledge about the enhancement of the intersections between theory and managerial practice.

The Conference Chair and Scientific Coordination

Sandro Castaldo, Arabella Mocciano Li Destri, Marta Ugolini, Lara Penco

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Resilient food service entrepreneurs and the Covid-19 pandemic ♦

ELISA MARTINELLI* FRANCESCO DE CANIO♦ GIUSEPPE NARDIN♦

Abstract

Objectives. *The paper aims at exploring the impact of entrepreneur's resilience and Covid-19 fear on the performance of food service businesses. As in micro- and small-businesses the individual and the business sides are strictly intertwined, resilience may be investigated using not only the entrepreneurial lens but also the psychological/clinical ones. Indeed, individual fear of the Covid-19 infection can alter the entrepreneur's approach in managing the business.*

Methodology. *The study consisted in administering a structured questionnaire to a sample of food service entrepreneurs (N. 139). Data was processed applying a linear regression analysis.*

Findings. *The work evidences that the fear of getting infected by the Covid-19 virus reduces business performance. However, the resilience capacity nurtured by food service businesses counteracts this negative impact.*

Research limits. *The work is explorative in nature and requires further investigation. The Covid-19 pandemic is still on-the-going while resilience should be studied after an adequate time span. However, it is important to immediately understand the phenomenon - due to its unprecedented effects and the lack of previous knowledge.*

Practical implications. *The food service sector is within the most affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. A deeper knowledge on the effects of the pandemic on business performance can enable small food service entrepreneurs to better rely and highly invest in their resilience capacity to face crises. It gives guidance to policy makers to support this goal.*

Originality of the study. *Business resilience continues to be scantily investigated in extant management literature on small firms. Moreover, studies on entrepreneurs' psychological resilience are concentrated on personality traits rather than concerns, such as individual fear. Thus, exploring the impact of Covid-19 fear to get infected on business performance is novel.*

Key words: *resilience; covid-19 pandemic; micro and small entrepreneur; fear of getting infected; food service.*

♦ Even if the paper is the result of a common effort of the authors, paragraphs 2, 3 and 6 can be attributed to Elisa Martinelli; parr. 4 and 5 to Francesca De Canio; paragraph 1 to Giuseppe Nardin.

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1. Introduction

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the Coronavirus (COVID-19) to be a pandemic (WHO, 2020).

Governments all over the world - even if with different time span and effectiveness - started to take extreme measures, such as social-distancing, use of Personal Protection Equipment (PPE), travel restrictions, lockdowns (local and national), etc., suddenly affecting economies worldwide. Many sectors and businesses suffered limitations in their operational activity and/or even stops, especially the ones considered not essential and riskier in terms of virus infection. This situation put performance under pressure. Within this context, the potential of entrepreneur's resilience may result in an important capacity to face the pandemic, able to preserve or better support performance. In fact, even the entrepreneur is a person who manages a business for profit and growth in risky conditions (Keith *et al.*, 2016), when a critical event happens his/her ability not only to survive but also to perform in an adequate way may be substantially threaten and put at risk.

Despite the increasing interest showed by extant literature to organisational resilience, "resilience at an individual level has received less attention, especially from the entrepreneur perspective" (Santoro *et al.*, 2020, p. 142). A few are the works specifically related to this topic (Bullough and Renko, 2013; Bullough *et al.*, 2014; Korber and McNaughton, 2018). Furthermore, extant literature acknowledges a role of the characteristics of entrepreneurs, narrowly defined in terms of their skills and education (Gunasekaran *et al.*, 2011), de-emphasising the role of the entrepreneur's individual resilience as well as the underlying positive connection between individual resilience and business success (Fisher *et al.*, 2016). This is especially evident when micro- and small-enterprises are concerned: the entrepreneur's individual capacities and characteristics can have a direct and significant role in the strategic and operational management of the enterprise, especially when critical events are disruptive to business operations. As such, "the capacities of the small firm to 'bounce back' or adapt to disruptions - an aspect of business success - is intimately entangled with the owner-manager's own personal resilience" (Wall and Bellamy, 2019, p. 270). Hence, studies investigating how entrepreneurs face crises are needed (Duchek, 2018), especially today: the pandemic has shown a magnitude, a geographical coverage and a time-length never experienced before, discarding traditional models and previous evidence.

Moreover, although several studies have explored the role of resilience in providing positive outcomes to entrepreneurs (among others: Ayala and Manzano, 2014; Baron and Markman, 2003; Envick, 2005), and some focus on entrepreneurs' psychological resilience, personality traits rather than concerns, such as individual fear, were considered. But the latter can alter the entrepreneur's approach in managing the business and studying resilience concentrating only on the organizational side may generate a partial view of the phenomenon. In particular, the role of fear for their own health, to the best of our knowledge, was not tested in an entrepreneurial context. Korber and McNaughton (2018) called for future contributions on entrepreneurship and resilience able at incorporating research from other fields. As in micro- and small-businesses the individual and the business sides are strictly intertwined, resilience may be investigated using not only the entrepreneurial lens but also the psychological/clinical ones. Indeed, individual fear to get infected by a virus in time of pandemic may alter the entrepreneur's approach in managing the business and, consequently, the relative performance. In this context, this paper aims at studying the impact of the natural biological disaster that is currently affecting our lives and economies - namely: the Covid-19 pandemic - in the food service sector, one of the most affected by the spread of the pandemic. Specifically, this work explores the role of entrepreneur's resilience and Covid-19 fear to get infected on the business performance of food service businesses.

The paper aspires at providing the following contributions. First, our work extends the knowledge on the impact of entrepreneur's resilience on business performance as scantily investigated focus, poorly empirically supported (Bhamra *et al.*, 2011; Linnenluecke, 2017; Martinelli *et al.*, 2018; (Martinelli and Tagliazucchi, 2018, 2019). Second, our study contributes to the literature on micro- and small-enterprises exploring the role of a novel factor such as individual

fear to get infected by a virus at work. Considering that the Italian economic system is mainly composed by small and micro-businesses - particularly in the food service sector - in which the psychological impacts of the potential infection on entrepreneurs might have shattering consequences on business continuity and performance, we selected the food service sector as empirical context of this research. In fact, this is a sector mainly constituted by micro- and small-enterprises and of critical importance for the Italian socio-economic system, both in terms of value added produced and employment, as well as in terms of social interactions and people living habits. Third, resilience to natural disasters has been mainly studied in the aftermath of sudden-onset events (Martinelli *et al.*, 2019), while a few are the works on slow on-set events like the outbreak and spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. The persistence of this crisis, currently still ongoing, and the long-term effects on small businesses are incredibly negative but still uncertain in their magnitude and possible end; as a consequence, empirical studies devoted to understand the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak are needed.

The present work is structured as follow: after having briefly presented the development of the literature on resilience in the business and management field, the hypotheses underpinning the study are depicted. Subsequently, the methodology adopted is described, detailing the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Italian food service sector, the sample features and the measurements employed. The survey results are then presented. A brief discussion of the theoretical, managerial and policy implications of these preliminary findings is offered in the conclusions paragraph, which reports the study limitations and the possible further research avenues.

2. Resilience in the business and management literature

External shocks, crisis of different nature and calamities are more and more recurrent worldwide and their effects may be highly negatively impacting on organizations and businesses (Linnenluecke, 2017). Inappropriate or delayed responses may seriously put the latter in danger (Williams *et al.*, 2017) and preventative strategies and approaches rendering businesses less vulnerable to disruptive events are increasingly needed. Apart from the long tradition of the disaster management discipline - mainly focused on disruptions inside firms and how these organizations could rely on processes and practices to ensure business continuity and avoid interruptions - a surge interest by the academic community is now taken by the resilience concept, its determinants and possible outcomes.

Resilience relates to the ability of an organization to “effectively absorb, develop situation-specific responses, and ultimately engage in transformative activities to capitalize on disruptive surprises that potentially threaten organization survival” (Lengnick-Hall *et al.*, 2011, p. 244). Studies in the field were mainly addressed at understanding the features allowing an organization to effectively overcome adversities and disruptions (Bhamra *et al.*, 2011), identifying some antecedents of resilience: cognitive or contextual enabling capabilities (e.g. Lengnick-Hall and Beck, 2005), slack resources (e.g. Sutcliffe and Vogus, 2003; Gittell *et al.*, 2006) and innovation (e.g. Hamel and Valikangas, 2003).

When contextualized to the field of business and management, resilience appears in its infancy (Linnenluecke, 2017) but in strong development, giving birth to some main branches: resilience determinants (Martinelli *et al.*, 2018, 2019); the adaptability of business models (Sutcliffe and Vogus, 2003; Hamel and Välikangas, 2003) and the design of resilient supply chains (Christopher and Peck, 2004; Pettit *et al.*, 2010; Ponis and Koronis, 2012). Moreover, two different perspectives are featuring the resilience conceptualization: the traditional one - named as the bouncing-back perspective - theorizes resilience as the recovery capacity to return to a pre-existing state, while the more recent view - and the bouncing-forward one (Martinelli and Tagliazucchi, 2019; Martinelli *et al.*, 2019) - which considers resilience as a capability enabling businesses to catch new opportunities (Sutcliffe and Vogus, 2003; Lengnick-Hall *et al.*, 2011; Martinelli *et al.*, 2018) and perform even better than the pre-crisis situation.

Extant literature evidenced that businesses display different level of resilience capacity in relation to the following features:

- the different array of resources and capabilities they possess (Martinelli *et al.*, 2018)
- the sector in which they operate - e.g. industry vs services
- the different size they possess.

Regarding the latter feature, small businesses face many challenges when hit by a critical event as they usually possess scarcer resources compares to bigger companies (Webb *et al.*, 2000), along with poorer managerial capabilities, intuitive and subjective decision-making and less formalized organizational structures (Lieberman-Yaconi *et al.*, 2010; Lussier and Sonfield, 2015). These features can result in serious constrictions when small businesses are hit by unexpected threats (Halkos *et al.*, 2018). However, small businesses can also display some advantages when facing a critical occurrence as “they are more flexible and better able to respond quickly to changing environments. This adaptive capability is crucial to improve resilience to crises such as natural disaster” (Battisti and Deakins, 2012, p. 6).

The resilience construct is relevant in the field of entrepreneurship research for two main reasons. First, resilience can help in understanding why some entrepreneurs and their businesses perform better than their non-resilient peers do. Second, cognitive and behavioral entrepreneurial traits are considered able to boost the business’ ability to adapt to new circumstances. The attributes of the individual entrepreneurs, directly and indirectly, have been shown to impact resilience of small enterprises, in terms of emotional attachment (Branicki *et al.*, 2018), personal characteristics (Battisti and Deakins, 2017), previous experience (Branicki *et al.*, 2018; Muñoz *et al.*, 2018), but also psychological traits. The latter is consistent with the conceptualisation of individual resilience, a construct firstly developed into the psychological and clinical domain and defined as a personal ability to adapt in the face of setbacks and in order to overcome adversities (Connor and Davidson, 2003). Indeed, the effects of a crisis or a disruptive event in micro- and small-enterprises is highly concerned with the psychological impact of the disruptive event upon the entrepreneur (Caliendo *et al.*, 2020; Van Gelder *et al.*, 2007), and related to the personal drawbacks s/he may suffer (Gherhes *et al.*, 2006). Indeed “natural disasters can severely constrain an entrepreneur’s ability to act freely, while also limiting resources. Such constraints can influence certain psychological variables that explain variance in entrepreneurial intentions and behaviour” (Monllor and Murphy, 2017, 622). From this viewpoint, the fear to get infected by a virus can modify the entrepreneur’s approach in managing the business and, consequently, the relative performance. However, extant literature did not consider this effect.

3. Research context and Hypotheses

The objective of the study is to explore the impact of organizational resilience and Covid-19 fear on the performance of food service entrepreneurs. Since resilience is a latent characteristic, this potential capacity can only be grasped and analyzed when it occurs (Linnenluecke, 2017).

The research context is featured by a specific kind of natural disaster, namely a pandemic. Indeed, natural disasters are a large group of extreme events: earthquakes, tsunami, volcanic eruption, floods, and bushfires are categorized as sudden on-set disasters while pandemics, climate changes and pollution are considered as slow-onset disasters (Cutter *et al.*, 2008). While the former cause unexpected damages in a limited time-period, with a definite beginning and end, the latter occur slowly and progressively, impacting in a subtle way (Staupe-Delgado, 2019). The Covid-19 pandemic falls into this latter group as it is a biologic slow-onset disaster particularly threatening as global and uncertain in its time-length, generating unforeseen effects.

Specifically, how organizational resilience impacts on business performance is drawn by leveraging on the concept of "adaptive fit": an organization adapts to the changed conditions of the surrounding environment (Lengnick Hall and Beck, 2005), “re-establish[ing] a strong fit between the firm and a new reality” (Lengnick Hall *et al.*, 2011, p. 244), in order not only to return to a

previous state of equilibrium but even performing better (Martinelli *et al.*, 2018). Consequently, we can postulate the following hypothesis:

HP1: organizational resilience exerts a significant and positive effect on business performance

Businesses in the food service sector tend to be owner-manager entrepreneur centric, and owner-managed (Gherhes *et al.*, 2016). In this kind of businesses, the organizational level and the individual-owner level are closely intertwined and difficult to extricate, posing a number of questions when resilience investigation is concerned. The individual level can prevail, due to the unformalized organizational structure of these small businesses and the key influence of the business owner (Lussier and Sonfield, 2015); this realistic acknowledgement can bring to postulate that business performance might be affected by the negative consequences of the spread of the virus at the individual psychological level. In the context of sudden events or recession times, some authors (e.g. Karman, 2000; Lengnick-Hall *et al.*, 2011; Linnenluecke *et al.*, 2012) showed that individual characteristics, thoughts and perceptions are translated into tangible actions, deeply affecting the response towards the disruptive event or the crisis faced. Indeed, the effects of a crisis or a disruptive event in small businesses is highly related to the psychological impact of the disruptive event upon the business owner (Caliendo *et al.*, 2020; Van Gelder *et al.*, 2007). Indeed “natural disasters can severely constrain an entrepreneur’s ability to act freely, while also limiting resources. Such constraints can influence certain psychological variables that explain variance in entrepreneurial intentions and behavior” (Monllor and Murphy, 2017, p. 622). When considering the specific sector under investigation, previous works proved that restaurateurs tend to attribute their failures to external conditions (Camillo *et al.*, 2008), while a study conducted by Parsa *et al.* (2005) indicated that internal factors are more frequently causes of failure - even if both are clearly important. Psychological reactions, such as anxiety and fear, are fundamental factors impacting individual’s behaviours. One of the central factors which might produce high levels of stress and anxiety during the pandemic is the fear of Covid-19 (Bitan *et al.*, 2020; Taylor *et al.*, 2020). From this viewpoint, the fear to get infected by the virus can negatively impact on the capacity of food service entrepreneurs to develop a good business performance, even if the effect can not only be direct but may be considered as moderating the causal link between organizational resilience and business performance, as the subsequent hypotheses are postulating.

HP2: The Covid-19 fear exerts a significant and negative effect on business performance

HP3: The Covid-19 fear moderates the relationship between organizational resilience and business performance

4. Methodology

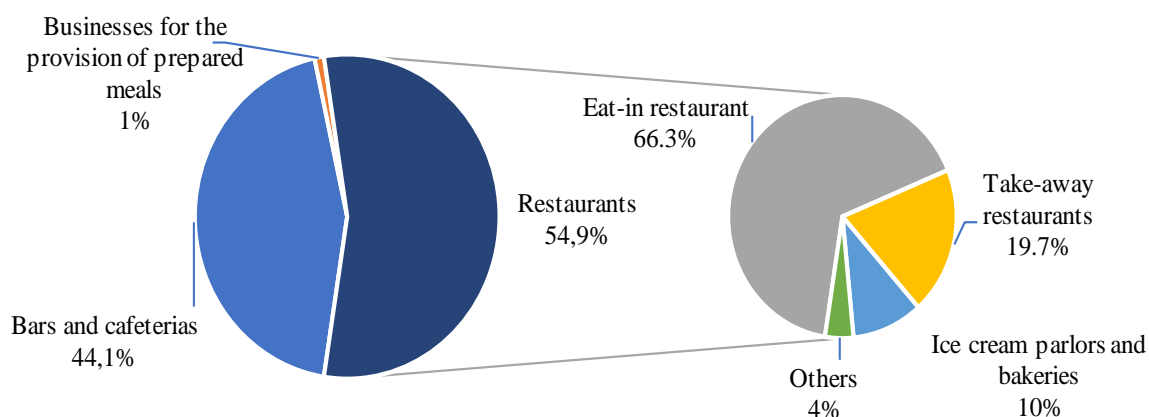
To reach the study aims a survey focused on a sample of small enterprises active during the Covid-19 emergency in the food and beverage service sector was performed.

4.1 The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the food service sector

The empirical context selected food service or catering sector, is the larger segment featuring the hospitality industry. Restaurants and cafés lead it, despite several other catering formats are included in the industry. In Italy, in particular, these businesses have an important commercial role aimed at satisfying food and beverage customers’ needs, but also a social and entertaining mission: restaurants and cafés tend to characterize the Italians’ lifestyle. Indeed, a long tradition is connected with bars and restaurants in the country. Bars and restaurants are widely distributed throughout the Italian peninsula: at the end of 2018 in Italy 336,137 enterprises belonging to the branch of food and beverages services were operating, producing a value added of more than €46 billion and

employing 918,105 people. Considering the overall number of businesses forming this sector, 184,587 (54.9%) were restaurants, 148,274 (44.1%) were bars or cafeterias, and the remaining 1% were businesses devoted to the provision of prepared meals, e.g., canteens or banqueting firms (FIPE, 2020a). As reported in Figure 1, the segment of restaurants also encompasses ice cream parlors and bakeries, which account for approximately the 10%, while take-away restaurants reach almost the 20% (FIPE, 2020).

Fig. 1: The food and beverages industry in Italy



Source: FIPE, Federazione Italiana Pubblici Esercizi (2020a)

The most common type of company in the sector is the sole proprietorship, which accounts for approximately 50% of total firms (FIPE, 2020a). Micro businesses dominate the Italian scenario of food and beverages services (Eurostat, 2021).

The sector was in good health and showed positive growth rates before the spread of the pandemic. Starting from the first national lockdown and the suspension of catering services - the 11th March 2020 - the situation changed completely. A survey conducted by Confimprese (2020), relatively to the activity of food service enterprises between March and April (Phase 1) and published in May, revealed that 24% of respondents declared of having lost more than 95% of the revenues in the period, compared to the previous year.

It has been estimated by INAIL that the lockdown measures taken relatively to the food service industry caused serious employment issues. Indeed, they represented the suspension of 1.1 million workers of the total of 1.2 million employed in the whole country. The re-opening of restaurants, bars and other food service enterprises was allowed from May 18th, after over 2 months of closures, in compliance with the provisions and protocols included in DPCM 05/17/20. Nevertheless, the rules concerning social distancing and the displacement of tables and chairs resulted in discouragement for many business owners of the sector. Worrying data were published in mid-May 2020, since Confimprese reported that the majority of the surveyed firms in the food and beverage services (51.43%) was against anticipated reopening, under the conditions and rules imposed; while the remaining portion of surveyed enterprises showed their approval (48.57%) (Confimprese, 2020). In this regard, also a large part of bars' business owners did not agree to re-opening under strict protocols, since the reduced capacity of the local, together with additional costs related with single-use materials and hygienic devices would exceed potential profits and cause further losses. In addition, a survey conducted from June 1st to 14th 2020 highlighted a persistent negative trend (-41% compared to June 2019), despite the resume of the activities in the sector (Pacifico, 2020), showing a constant growth of both home delivery (+15.5%) and takeaway services (+19%), in comparison to the previous year. A continuous assessment of the activity after the restart of operations on May 18th, 2020 has also been conducted by FIPE, by administering surveys to 340 micro-enterprises in the food service and leisure sectors. Indeed, an evaluation of performances of food and beverages service enterprises, during the four weeks after the reopening, showed a very

slow but positive trend of their activities starting from the very beginning of Phase 2. However, a relevant general pessimistic attitude among business owners was detected by FIPE (2020b), since, four weeks after the end of the lockdown, only 51.5% of them was satisfied with the reopening. In addition, after a month from the reopening, the majority of business owners (66.4%) were not optimistic about the possibility of completely come back to their performance's level before Covid-19 (FIPE, 2020b). Other alarming data collected by FIPE (2020b) concerned the number of workers employed after May 18th's reopening. Indeed, on average, the studied enterprises were only using 27.0% of their employees, compared to pre-Covid-19.

During summer, the negative trend in performance has started to slow down, because people have been eating out more frequently from the beginning of July 2020. As regards the food service sector, it registered losses around 50% during the last two weeks of June 2020; while the losses of the sector were around 37% in the first two weeks of July 2020 (Di Palma, 2020). Therefore, signs of a slight and slow recovery have emerged at that time. Despite this signal of recovery, data from FIPE still highlighted concerns for the entire sector, since the majority of enterprises was still suffering consistent losses and was under a great pressure at the beginning of July 2020. Indeed, around 61% of the surveyed business owners was satisfied of the reopening, while a larger portion (68%) still showed serious concerns, by not believing in a full recovery of their activity, up to pre-Covid-19 performance levels. Further data from Osservatorio Confimprese-EY (2020), confirmed a decline of 37.8% on average during the 2020 for the food & beverage industry due to the Covid-19 pandemic in the country.

Starting from October 2020, the situation began to getting worst again and the new restrictions introduced by the government put new limitations and stops to the food service businesses on a regional base. This is the context in which our study took place, as detailed in the subsequent paragraphs.

4.2 Research method

The survey involved a number of small business owners currently running different typologies of enterprises - including bars, restaurants, pizzerias, pubs, cafeterias and others and took place in some selected municipalities of the Modena province, in order to avoid peculiarities and specificities only related to one particular city. A structured questionnaire was administered face-to-face by two trained interviewers in the period between October 15th and November 13th 2020, since the entering of the Emilia-Romagna region in the orange, and then red area, lead to limit the restaurants and cafés activity only to take-away, rendering impossible the data collection.

Before starting to administer the questionnaire, lists of all the enterprises belonging to the food and beverage service sector that were active at the moment of the research in the selected municipalities were prepared through a desk analysis. Subsequently, the questionnaire was tested on a few business owners. The administration of the first questionnaires allowed for the identification of comprehension problems related with some questions and the need to reduce the time required to fill it. As a result, the interviewers came up with another version of the structured questionnaire, by following the suggestions of the first participants and by re-elaborating several questions to make them clearer, in addition to reduce the overall amount of questions. A further test was made by using the second version of the questionnaire. In this second step, other business owners were involved and further problems with the length of the survey were detected, since in the majority of the cases the business owners were working by themselves in their enterprises. Finally, a third and final version of the questionnaire was prepared.

In restaurants, pizzerias and trattorias, the questionnaires were mainly administered before or after their working timetable, respectively between 10:00-11:30 in the morning and 14:00-15:30 in the afternoon; while, in bars and cafeteria they were mainly administered in those moments in which, typically, very few customers hang out in the venue or shortly before their closing time.

4.3 The sample

The sample is composed by 139 food service businesses, including both bars and cafeterias (55.4%) and restaurants, pizzerias and trattorias (44.6%). The location of such enterprises was in the city centre for 24.5% of the units and outside it for the remaining 75.5% (Table 1).

Tab. 1: Typology and location

Variable	Frequency	%	% Cumulative
Typology of food service business	139	100.0	
- Bar/Cafeteria	77	55.4	55.4
- Restaurant/Pizzeria/Trattoria	62	44.6	100.0
Location in the city center	139	100.0	
- No	105	75.5	75.5
- Yes	34	24.5	100.0

Source: our elaboration

The interviewees were mainly business owners (69.1%) or partners (29.5%), males (64.0%), with an average age of 46 years (Table 2). The sample includes people from different generations, since the youngest interviewee is 21, while the oldest is 68. In addition, the majority of participants are high school graduates (50.7%) or junior high school graduates (40.6%), while only few interviewees have a very low educational level - elementary school (1.4%) - or very high ones - bachelor's degree (5.1%) and master's degree (2.2%).

Tab. 2: Interviewees' role and demographic features

Variable	Frequency	Min	Max	Mean	St. Dev.	%	% Cumulative
Role in the enterprise	139					100.0	
- Owner	96					69.1	69.1
- Partner	41					29.5	98.6
- Manager (business rental)	2					1.4	100.0
Sex	139					100.0	
- Male	89					64.0	64.0
- Female	50					36.0	100.0
Birth year	139	1952	1999			100.0	
- [1950-1960]	15					10.8	10.8
- [1961-1970]	41					29.5	40.3
- [1971-1980]	43					30.9	71.2
- [1981-1990]	28					20.1	91.4
- [1991-2000]	12					8.6	100.0
Age	139	21	68	46.33	11.62		
Educational level	138					100.0	
- Elementary school	2					1.4	1.4
- Junior high school	56					40.6	42.0
- High school diploma	70					50.7	92.8
- Bachelor's degree	7					5.1	97.8
- Master's degree	3					2.2	100.0

Source: our elaboration

16 out of 139 interviewees - 11.5% - have more than one enterprise in the sector of interest. Of the above-mentioned 16 entrepreneurs, 14 of them have another business activity (87.5%), while one entrepreneur has two additional businesses (6.3%) and another one has three (6.3%).

Regarding the enterprises' features (Table 3), 72.7% of them were born from the 1997 onwards. The remaining ones have longer histories and have experienced a development through the years (23.0%). A minority of them (4.3%), instead, has more than 44 years and in some cases are family business which lived one, or more, generational passages. As a result, there is a relevant standard deviation (14.19 years) referred to the age of the enterprises in the sample.

Further information collected are related with the dimensions of the venue and the kitchen. This data is helpful to understand the number of customers that can be directly served and seated in the available area.

A large majority of business owners rented the venue of the enterprise they are currently running (86.3%), while only 13.7% of them owns the place.

Tab. 3: Businesses' features

Variable	Frequency	Min	Max	Mean	St. Dev.	%	% Cumulative
Opening year of the enterprise	139	1956	2020			100.0	
- [1956-1976]	6					4.3	4.3
- [1977-1996]	32					23.0	27.3
- [1997-2006]	30					21.6	48.9
- [2007-2017]	40					28.8	77.7
- [2017-2020]	31					22.3	100.0
Age of the enterprise	139	0	64	16.23	14.19		
Area of the venue (sqm.)	135	22	1000	153.17	137.91		
Area of the kitchen (sqm.)	135	/	150	32.56	31.43		
The venue is	139					100.0	
- Owned	19					13.7	13.7
- Rented	120					86.3	100.0

Source: our elaboration

Regarding the observed businesses' dimensions (Table 4), there has been a slight negative variation in the total number of employees (-0.54), in the part-time (-0.08) and occasional ones (-0.27). The reason behind such minor variation may be found in the economic help provided by the government during spring and summer 2020. Indeed, one of the questions inserted in the following section asked whether the enterprise used layoff to guarantee a salary to their employees. From this question emerged that 82 enterprises (59.0%), on the total of 139 investigated, used layoff for their employees. Probably the use of such economic help limited the creation of a gap in employment in this sector between the end of 2019 and Autumn 2020.

As far as sales are concerned, interviewees were asked about 2019 sales and the expected variation registered in revenues, in comparison to 2019. Since only 36 participants over 139 were willing to share their revenues value of 2019, it was not possible to comment on this element. On the other hand, almost the entire sample was able to provide an estimated percentage of variation in revenues that they have suffered in 2020, on average -34.56%. The general tendency in the sector suggests that the large majority of enterprises have experienced a loss during spring and summer 2020 (84.8%); very few firms have registered an increase in their revenues (4.5%), up to October 2020. The reasons behind such increases in revenues, in some cases, have to be found in a business model change, like the introduction of a new type of service - takeaway, home delivery, drive-in - or in the adoption of a new strategy. On the other hand, there are also few firms that did not register an increase, nor a decrease in revenues (6.3%). In some of the cases, the reason is associated with the degree of diversification of the enterprise, since several participants reported that they did not suffer a loss in their revenues thanks to the presence of tobaccos in their bar. Because of this diversification of the business, they had the obligation to remain opened during the entire Covid-19 emergency, which allowed them to sell tobaccos and scratch cards in large quantities and to compensate the loss suffered because of the suspension of the bar's activity. Finally, few enterprises (4.5%) could not precisely tell whether or not they were suffering a loss or an increase in revenues, compared to 2019, at the moment of the interview, by stating that it would depend on their amount of work or possible new governmental restrictions during Christmas holidays.

Tab. 4: Businesses' dimension and estimated Covid-19 effect on performance

Variable	Freq.	Min	Max	Mean	St. Dev.	$\Delta\%$ mean	%	% Cum.
Staff members at the end of 2019	137							
- Total		1	20	5.44	3.79			
- of which, part-time				1.32	2.30			
- of which, occasional				0.98	2.28			
Staff members at the present day	138							
- Total		1	22	4.90	3.47	-0.54		
- of which, part-time				1.24	2.01	-0.08		
- of which, occasional				0.71	1.79	-0.27		
Revenues in 2019	36	30.000€	900.000€					
Possible revenues' variation at the present day (%)	112	-83%	+20%	-34.56%	19.00		100.0	
- 0% variation	7						6.3	6.3
- Positive variation	5						4.5	10.8
- Negative variation	95						84.8	95.6
- Not sure because it depends on Christmas holidays	5						4.5	100.0

Source: our elaboration

4.4 Measurements

The measurements used to test the postulated hypotheses were evaluated on a 7-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree; 7= strongly agree).

The organizational resilience construct was measured adopting the scale tested by Kantur and İşeri Say (2015), which first propose a measurement scale focused on resilience capacity, where elements linked to the robustness of the company facing the critical event, its ability to adapt easily and quickly to new environmental conditions and cohesion within the people working in the business are key. As a matter of fact, three are the dimensions constituting organizational resilience: robustness, rapidity and integrity. As can be observed in the table below, the highest mean value reported is for the first robustness' item. This item refers to the constant attempt of business owners to provide continuity to their enterprises and the average result confirms that the totality of respondents is currently pursuing this objective. Moreover, other higher mean values assessed the integrity dimension, evidencing that in this sample of enterprises there is a strong tendency in employees to be committed and pursue a common goal. On the other hand, some of the lower mean values define the rapidity dimension.

Covid-19 Fear was assessed employing a reduced scale validate by Bitan *et al.* (2020) in the psychologic field.

The dependent variable is Business Performance, considered as the ability to generate sales and profitability in comparison with the pre-Covid situation, measured by two items evaluated on a 7-point Likert scale coded from 1 "very decreased" to 7 "very increased".

Tab. 5: Investigated Constructs and related items

	Items	Mean	St. Dev.
Resilience	My organization stands straight and preserves its position.	6.65	0.954
	My organization is successful in generating diverse solutions.	5.59	1.402
	My organization shows resistance to the end in order not to lose.	5.12	1.685
	My organization does not give up and continue its path.	5.98	1.406
	My organization rapidly takes actions.	5.43	1.665
	My organization develops alternatives in order to benefit from negative circumstances.	4.72	1.858
	My organization is agile in taking required actions when needed.	5.71	1.415
	My organization is a place where all employees engaged to do what is required from them.	6.26	1.192
Covid Fear	My organization is successful in acting as a whole with all of its employees.	6.28	1.167
	Fear of being infected by the virus on my part or my collaborators	3.97	2.340
Business Performance	Fear for my customers	4.45	2.090
	Sales evolution in comparison with the pre-Covid-19 situation	2.41	1.310
	Profitability evolution in comparison with the pre-Covid-19 situation	2.43	1.323

Source: our elaboration

In the following table (Tab. 6) the reliability measures (i.e. α -Cronbach) are reported for each investigated construct.

Tab. 6: Reliability measure for each dimension

Constructs	N. item	Average	Dev. St.	α -Cronbach
Resilience	9	49.123	.93735	0.812
Covid Fear	2	44.842	156.808	0.792
Business Performance	2	24.203	124.999	0.898

Source: our elaboration

5. Results

A linear regression was performed employing Business performance as the dependent variable while organizational resilience and Covid-19 fear as independent variables. The model considered not only a direct effect of Covid-19 fear but also an interaction effect between organizational resilience and Covid-19 fear on Business performance.

Results evidence an acceptable model fit (Table 7), considering the target of interviewees composed by small entrepreneurs.

Tab. 7: Linear regression coefficients

Models	Non-standardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients
	B	Std. Error	Beta
(Constant)	1.411	.555	
ORGR	.456	.104	.342***
COVIDF	-.275	.062	-.345***
MODERATOR	.005	.092	.004 ^{n.s.}

$R^2 = .202$ ($p < .001$).

*** $p < .001$.

n.s.: Not significant

Source: our elaboration

Findings show that organizational resilience exerts a significant and positive effect on food service entrepreneurs' performance, while the Covid-19 fear exerts a direct, but not moderating, and negative effect on the dependent variable. The work evidences that the fear of getting infected by the Covid-19 virus reduces business performance but the resilience capacity nurtured by food service entrepreneurs is able to counteract this negative effect.

6. Conclusions

The paper has explored the role of resilience and fear of get infected by the Covid-19 virus on micro- and small-enterprise performance. In so doing the paper contributes to extant literature on entrepreneur's resilience confirming its role in enhancing performance even during a slow on-set natural disaster such as the current pandemic. This was not foregone as the latter has shown a magnitude, a global exposure and a time-persistence never experienced before. This work has also highlighted a novel effect when dealing with psychological individual resilience: the entrepreneur's fear of getting infected by the virus directly impacts performance and have to be managed together with the entrepreneur's resilient capacity to face adversities. Consequently, the paper extends previous findings by Caliendo *et al.* (2020) and Monllor and Murphy (2017) focused only on the phycological attitude of the entrepreneur. In case of slow on-set disasters, the fear for their own, employees and customers health play an important negative role and should be included in the possible factors affecting business performance.

From a managerial viewpoint, the food service sector has been severely hit by the Covid-19 pandemic and its businesses evidenced relevant decreases in sales and had to stop or limited their operational activities, putting at serious risk their business continuity. In this context, the study aimed at exploring the role that organizational resilience can display on business performance during the spread of the pandemic, evidencing the important impact that resilient food service businesses might have on their success. In fact, having created a resilient organization, food service entrepreneurs can counteract the psychological side-effect created by the fear to get infected by the virus. As the organizational and individual level in such small businesses tend to overlap, our study contributes to the literature on resilience testing that the fear of the virus does not moderate but exert a direct negative effect on business performance.

A deeper knowledge on the effects of the pandemic on business performance, also considering that the pandemic last longer than other crises, can enable small food service entrepreneurs to better rely and higher invest in their resilience capacity to face crises. The long-stand of a pandemic may represent a moment in which the entrepreneur finds out resilient actions by properly leveraging his/her business resources and capabilities - although limited as in case of small and micro businesses, building on robustness, agility and integrity. This represent a key point for small food service businesses at the light of the increasing number of epidemics and pandemics hitting the food service setting since the beginning of the 21st century. Accordingly, the identification of resilient practices today, may represent a preventive strategy to cope with future and frequent expected crises. At the same time our findings can give guidance to policy makers to support entrepreneurs not only from an economic point of view, but also psychologically. So, together with subsidies, taxes exemptions/suspensions and other economic provisions, policy makers should also organize medical supporting services to strengthen the mental traits of food service entrepreneurs. Similarly to other individuals, entrepreneurs fear to be infected by the virus running their activity. However, to rescue their business they continue to operate. This study shows that a resilient organization is effectively compensating the Covid-19 fear. This aspect is key in service businesses, where there is a high contact between people (e.g. owner/employees and customers).

This is a preliminary study and it is affected by some limits. Firstly, its explorative nature reduces the possibility to generalize results and calls for further investigation. Secondly, the Covid-19 pandemic is still on-the-going while resilience should be studied after an adequate time span from the hit of the disaster. However, it is important to immediately start to understand the phenomenon - due to its unprecedented effects and the lack of previous knowledge - even in the short term, paving the way to next longitudinal studies. Third, no control variables were considered at this stage, while the business age and size can play a role (e.g. Battisti and Deakins, 2017). Fourth, the regression analysis carried out makes it possible to give a first reading of the relationships between the variables, but other methodologies - such as structural equation modeling (SEM), for instance - could provide a more solid and complete understanding of the model effects.

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