Business Communication Strategy of Tanah Abang Traders Facing the Flow of Live Streaming Commerce (LSC)

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Abstract

Tanah Abang, as one of the largest shopping malls in Indonesia, is facing significant changes in consumer behavior, which is increasingly turning from traditional buying to live-streaming commerce platforms. This research is intended to explore and analyze the business communication strategies implemented by merchants in Tanah Abang in response to the growing trend of live-streaming commerce (LSC). This research uses a case study approach to traders in Tanah Abang and analyzes how they adjust their business communication strategies in line with technological developments and the live-streaming commerce phenomenon. This research methodology uses a descriptive qualitative design, with data collection through in-depth interviews with traders, direct observation at the trading location, and content analysis presented by traders on social media. The results of this study provide valuable insights into business communication strategies suitable for live-streaming commerce, including the use of social media, product promotion, customer interaction, and other tactics. The findings of this study have important implications for merchants in Tanah Abang and similar businesses in various countries that are facing changes in the world of commerce due to the impact of technology and changes in consumer behavior. In addition, this study contributes to the literature on business communication strategies in the context of e-commerce and the rapidly growing live-streaming commerce.

Keywords*: Business Communication Strategy, Live-Streaming Commerce, E-commerce, Tanah Abang, Merchants, Consumer Behavior.*

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A. INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 and post-Covid pandemic situation in Indonesia has resulted in an economic slowdown, where the market has experienced a decrease in activity and a significant decline in sales turnover. Although the Government has issued stimulus and assistance to support businesses and overcome the impact of a weak economy, especially on Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), business actors who have many limitations, must continue to strive to survive the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in maintaining the sustainability of their businesses. The role of street vendors in this economic sector is very important, not only as a labor opportunity for those who cannot work in the formal sector, but also in increasing community economic activity. The current economic conditions also have an impact on the sustainability of the traders' businesses, as evidenced by the significant decline in their sales turnover.

The pandemic situation has changed people's shopping behavior, mainly by switching to online platforms for transactions to avoid the spread of the Covid virus, in addition to previously having started using this new style of shopping which is considered more practical, easier and faster. One of the strategies that can be taken is to adapt to this condition by utilizing social media platforms, online stores in e-commerce applications, and shopping through websites.

The most visible impact of the Covid-19 pandemic is that many companies have had to close their businesses permanently due to significant losses. Company operations are disrupted, especially for companies that cannot continue production because employees cannot work at the workplace. However, it cannot be denied that companies that rely on technology allow employees to work from home, so their business operations can still continue.

Tanah Abang, located in Jakarta, Indonesia, is one of the largest shopping centers in Southeast Asia. The neighborhood is famous for its many merchants and shops offering a variety of products, including clothing and textiles.

When the Covid-19 pandemic began, Pasar Tanah Abang was not operating due to PPKM restrictions imposed by the government in 2021 (Victoria, 2023). Unfortunately, after two years, the market has not returned to its previous condition. This can be seen from the decreasing of enthusiasm of buyers at special moments during the months of Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr and Christmas. Hery Supriyanta, the manager of Tanah Abang Blok A Market, said that the prolonged condition is often complained about by traders, which has resulted in a decrease in their business income. The traders suspect that the lack of sales in Tanah Abang is due to the trend of online shopping through Live Shopping which is currently rife on social media such as on Instagram, Tiktok and also on Shopee E-Commerce.

Another reason for the visitors decreasing of the Tanah Abang market is that the prices offered through these online platforms are very cheap and there are free shipping options. The merchants expressed their anxiety that they do not have the ability to sell on digital platforms so they are unable to compete with online stores that are heavily increased, especially on social media using the Live-Streaming Commerce feature.

In recent years, technological developments have changed the way consumers shop. The phenomenon of live-streaming shopping through e-commerce applications has become an important trend in many countries, including Indonesia. This stream of live shopping opens up huge business opportunities but also presents unique communication challenges for Tanah Abang merchants who are still relatively conventional. In fact, an effective business communication strategy is essential to win the competition, attract consumer attention, and build strong relationships in the competitive world of face-to-face commerce.

In recent decades, Tanah Abang has become a must-visit destination for local shoppers and tourists looking for a variety of products at affordable prices. However, the traditional Tanah Abang market has faced various challenges that threaten its survival. One of the biggest challenges faced by the

Tanah Abang market is the growing phenomenon of live shopping. Live Shopping Commerce is a rapidly growing form of shopping activity, especially in the digital era, where sellers live stream their products to showcase to potential buyers viewing online. In this format, consumers can view products in real-time, interact with sellers, and even make purchases without having to come to a physical store. This can be categorized as a more interactive and social form of e-commerce.

Some of the negative impacts that can be seen with the existence of Live-Streaming Commerce on the Tanah Abang traditional market (Nazar, 2023) are as follows: (1) Tougher Competition: Sellers in the Live Shopping model often have expertise in digital marketing and social media. They can reach a wider range of potential buyers, who may have previously only shopped at Tanah Abang, (2) Ease and Convenience: Live Shopping provides convenience for consumers, who can shop from the comfort of their homes without having to deal with the crowds or traffic in Tanah Abang, (3) Promotions and Discounts: Sellers in Live Shopping often offer special promotions and discounts that appeal to potential buyers, making it a more viable option, and (4) Safety and Health: In the context of a pandemic like COVID-19, Live Shopping offers a safer solution for consumers who want to minimize social interaction and physical contact.

Based on the explanation above, the formulation of the problem in this study is what is the business communication strategy of traders in Tanah Abang in the face of live-streaming commerce? The purpose of this research is to find out and analyze the planning and implementation of business communication strategies of traders in Tanah Abang in the face of live-streaming commerce.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

This research is inspired by several previous studies, including those from Wang et al (2022) which discuss how live streaming commerce (LSC) has changed purchasing decisions in E-commerce in China. The results show that LSC provides an opportunity for merchants to exchange information with consumers based on their needs so that they can provide services to consumers. With the right information and a pleasant shopping atmosphere, consumers are happy to shop through the LSC system.

The next research discusses the impact of live-streaming on purchase intentions in e-commerce consumers by Sarah and Sobari (2022). This research specializes in purchasing intentions through live-streaming and how it relates to consumer trust and engagement formed with consumers. The results obtained show that live streaming greatly influences consumer confidence in the product, which in turn leads to purchase intentions.

Research that also inspired this research is from Kusnadi, Loisa, and Pandrianto (2021) who analyzed the marketing communication strategy of the Lauxes 7 online store that uses Tokopedia as an e-commerce application. The strategy carried out is to use advertisements on WhatsApp and other sales promotions. Of the two consumer groups, namely B2C and B2B, each is directed to use a different approach, namely with Facebook and Instagram for B2C, while for B2B the recommendation is to use personal selling and direct marketing via WhatsApp. The overall strategy is structured by following the AIDA marketing communication model.

This research will use the Communication Planning theory approach from Middleton (1980). Companies utilize communication planning as a strategic process to create and execute efficient communication plans. The goal is to ensure the right message reaches the right audience at the right time through the right channel. Some of the key elements generally included in communication planning are 1) Audience Analysis, which is the stage of identifying and understanding the target audience, taking into account demographics, psychographics, and communication preferences. 2) Message Development, where messages are planned in a clear, concise, and audience-specific manner. 3) Channel Selection, to establish appropriate communication channels based on audience preferences and behavior. 4) Timing and Scheduling, allocated to consider the timing of the communication in an effort to maximize impact. 5) Feedback and Evaluation, undertaken to establish a feedback mechanism to understand how the message was received. 6) Integrated Communication, where messages are delivered with consistency across multiple communication channels for a cohesive message, and 7) Cultural Considerations, done to plan for various cultural nuances in message design and delivery.

Omnichannel

The concept of Omnichannel marketing refers to a sales and marketing strategy that integrates multiple distribution or sales channels to provide a consistent and pleasant experience to customers as described by Lee in Alfina et. al (2021). In this strategy, business is conducted using various communication and transaction channels, such as physical stores, websites, mobile applications, social media platforms, and others to maximize customer satisfaction. The main goal is to develop consistency, mutual understanding, and kindness in interacting with customers without dictating what they should buy. Some of the key characteristics of the omnichannel marketing concept are technology integration, understanding customer behavior, and the ability to deliver consistent benefits across multiple segments.

Promotion Mix

In designing communication strategies related to business activities, of course, it is necessary to use a promotional mix approach, one of which is to use Kotler's (2016) promotional mix. This promotion mix, also known as the marketing communication mix (Darmawan and Fahira, 2023) is divided into (1) advertising, (2) public relations, (3) personal selling, (4) sales promotion, and (5) direct marketing tools that are important to attract consumer interest and create engagement, communicate messages persuasively, which will form a good relationship between sellers and consumers. This strategy is relevant to what traders in Tanah Abang need to do to face new challenges in business so that their sales are right on target.

Digital Marketing Communication

Rizaldi & Hidayat (2020) mentioned that digital marketing is one of the marketing methods that is currently very popular and sought after by the public. As mentioned in the explanation above, people today are slowly starting to leave conventional purchasing patterns, then adopting modern marketing patterns using digital devices. This pattern is called digital marketing. Through this method, all communication and transaction processes in buying and selling become easier, more practical, and faster. Choosing the right online media will support merchants in growing their business in a faster way too. This online media can be in the form of a digital page (website), email, social media, or by using live-streaming commerce (LSC); a way of selling that is currently very popular with netizens.

C. METHOD

This research will be conducted using descriptive qualitative methods to get a complete picture of the situation and conditions experienced by traders in Tanah Abang, which are affected by the rise of live-streaming commerce (LSC). Data were collected through FGDs with a number of traders who open shops in Tanah Abang Market, as well as interviews with several traders who open shops in Tanah Abang, as well as several sources who are actors of live-streaming commerce through the TikTok application. As a complement, secondary data was also collected through various documents and literature related to marketing communications and social media.

D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The high number of MSMEs in Indonesia, which amounts to around 64.19 million, has the largest composition of Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs), namely 64.13 million (99.92%) of the entire business sector (Bahtiar, 2021). These MSMEs are also the most affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. According to the results of the Katadata Insight Center (KIC) survey conducted on around 206 MSME players in Jabodetabek, there is a percentage of MSMEs of 82.9% feeling the negative impact of this pandemic and only 5.9% experiencing positive growth. The pandemic condition has caused 63.9% of the affected MSMEs to experience a decrease in income of more than 30%. Only 3.8% of MSMEs experienced an increase in income from their business.

One of the largest trading markets in Central Jakarta is Tanah Abang Market. This market has been a symbol for decades and is very popular with people, both locals from Jakarta and other regions. Tanah Abang Market attracts visitors because here they can find a wide variety of goods at affordable prices. Tanah Abang Market is also famous as a place for large transactions between provinces and even Asia, due to easy access and the availability of various accommodation facilities in the vicinity (Paramita et al., 2018).

With a wide variety of products for sale and relatively affordable and competitive prices, this market has become the main destination for many people, especially micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), which in this context act as resellers who resell goods that they buy in wholesale quantities at Tanah Abang Market, into small party merchandise in their stores. The development of information technology and the entry of the era of society 5.0, where information and digital technology is seen as something that becomes a secondary need of human life, opens up opportunities to reduce economic inequality. This has facilitated the business of MSMEs in Tanah Abang Market, with many sellers starting to switch to online sales so that buyers can make transactions online without having to come directly to the market.

Tanah Abang Market has become the largest clothing trading and wholesale center in Southeast Asia, which is divided into several blocks with more than 55,000 kiosk or shop vendors (Kompas.com - 24/09/2023). Tanah Abang has experienced a decline from year to year, with 595 traders in 2018 dropping to 149 traders in 2019, and decreasing again to 70 traders in 2020. Merchants in Tanah Abang Market generally offer various types of goods, ranging from fashion clothing, carpets, worship equipment, and so on. Merchants with clothing sales dominate in Tanah Abang Market Block F area which is diluted to offer relatively more affordable selling prices compared to other blocks.

Live Shopping/Live Commerce Trend

Live shopping is a new trend in Indonesia, practiced by merchants/retailers in an effort to gain multiple times the profit in just a few hours. Live shopping has become an in-demand marketing and sales tactic in recent years, especially since the Covid 19 pandemic. This trend has increased along with the growth of Internet access in Indonesia and the growth of millennials and Gen Z who are digital natives. Live shopping is a new method of doing online shopping that not only applies elements of social commerce but also involves the use of specific media (Fransiska et al, 2020). Live shopping is a buying and selling activity that is carried out live / live broadcast by the seller in real time (Xu et al. 2020). Live shopping allows sellers to be able to communicate two-way directly in e-commerce or s-commerce and inform about the products they offer (Andika et al, 2021) and has a tendency to offer much more economical prices to buyers.

Wang (2019) stated that live streaming is a form of online communication and a real-time transmission mode of "collecting, releasing and watching video information at the same time" on the Internet; live streaming e-commerce is a form of combining live streaming and e-commerce to sell products by streaming, temporarily gathering consumers together, it builds a high-frequency scene and strong interaction between sellers and buyers. Live streaming activities will create a social relationship between consumers and streamers and unconsciously, consumers have become fans. Mike (2016) states that one of the keys to the success of live streaming that can stimulate buyers to be interested in the products offered and ultimately make a purchase is effective communication from the seller/streamer, which focuses on communication with users from various perspectives such as initiative, interaction, and user concern for the product being promoted.

In live shopping activities, buyers can ask questions about products and their details and do not rule out the possibility of making price quotes through the chat feature on the social media application used. This live shopping activity can be an entertainment channel for viewers who follow the live shopping session so that online shopping activities become more varied, more interactive, interesting, and fun (Cai et al, 2018).

The ongoing trend of live shopping has raised concerns among traditional merchants who do not have the knowledge and skills to use social media platforms and practice live shopping. The government also expressed concern that live shopping will harm offline/traditional retailers. Based on a survey conducted by Populix of Indonesian consumers published in May 2023, 800 out of 1,000 consumers have tried shopping on several social media platforms, and TikTok Shop is one of the most popular social media shopping sites, especially with live shopping. TikTok has 325 million monthly active users in Southeast Asia, most of whom are from Indonesia. The TikTok application at the beginning of its appearance is a platform for sharing short videos. But as Tiktok's features develop, this social media currently has a live streaming shopping feature.

This live streaming feature facilitates users to make purchase transactions directly from within the live video they are watching. Users can also see conversations between sellers and other potential buyers regarding the products that are being offered during the live streaming. This activity has an impact on consumer shopping behavior; generating a desire to immediately ask questions and make purchases before the products offered are sold out. The stock status of the products offered can also be seen on the live streaming video screen, thus further strengthening the desire to shop. The live streaming feature on Tiktok provides many benefits and advantages for both sellers and buyers. Although it still does not rule out the possibility of obstacles related to access and information technology literacy for buyers.

Shopping via live streaming has become a trending phenomenon among sellers using social commerce platforms. This social commerce model is able to utilize live streaming as a tool to boost sales and increase the number of buyers. The integration of live streaming has provided a significant change in the practice of social commerce, allowing for direct interaction between customers and sellers, as well as providing customized services and guidance during the live streaming process conducted online/through digital platforms.

Based on data informed by the Central Bureau of Statistics, there was a substantial increase of 34.10% in the number of businesses involved in e-commerce activities in Indonesia. Another survey result conducted by JakPat, emphasized that 83.7% of Indonesians actively use and watch live streaming shopping features. This shows an increasing trend of reliance on online platforms for shopping purposes. This increase in e-commerce activity is especially evident on digital platforms such as Shopee and TikTok, where both platforms have adopted live streaming shopping features.

Business Communication Strategy of Tanah Abang Traders

Along with the rise of live streaming activities on several digital platforms, many Tanah Abang Market merchants have to face the fact that their income is being eliminated by merchants who are able to do live shopping through their online shops. In terms of price, live shopping sales can provide prices that are far below the average and fair market price. According to NK, one of the garment traders in Tanah Abang Market, her income has decreased drastically since the existence of Live Streaming Commerce. The price strategy set by live streaming merchants is so low that merchants feel confused to set the price of the products they offer. A similar opinion was also expressed by S, a fashion stall owner at Tanah Abang Market who stated that the existence of LSC did have an impact on the decline in visitors to his shop because individual buyers began to favor buying online. However, for large purchases, according to him, their old customers have not really changed. The average old customer continues to order goods as usual. However, according to S, some merchants feel a bit confused about starting to trade through the live streaming feature because they don't know where to start.

A number of traders in the affected Tanah Abang Market have tried to adapt by selling online. However, in reality if they do live streaming commerce, then their resellers located in the regions will be confused in pricing, to be able to compete with their competitors. (CNBC Indonesia, September 20, 2023). One of the things that makes Tanah Abang Market quiet is that more and more manufacturers are also doing Live Streaming, selling their products directly to consumers without going through retailers. The price scheme offered by producers to consumers is the same as the price usually offered by retailers to consumers. So, in this context, retailers are suffering huge losses because they are unable to compete in price with their producers. The losses experienced by traders have exceeded 50% of normal profits. According to NK, usually before Live Streaming Commerce, he could get a net profit of around 12 million rupiahs per month, but after Live Streaming Commerce, it is very difficult to get a profit, even as much as 500 thousand rupiahs. From the consumer's perspective, this is certainly very beneficial for them but at the same time detrimental to offline merchants who still like to sell their products traditionally. One of the traders, HD, said that they should adapt to the changes in consumer behavior by changing their way of selling to online or combining online and offline strategies in an integrated manner, also known as Omnichannel.

In addition to making adjustments, the local government should ideally provide counseling, learning and assistance for traders so that they have the ability to sell in online markets. Furthermore, S said that there is an imbalance between traditional and online traders, one of which is that traditional traders are less skilled in branding matters. Online traders are very creative in branding products, creative in making photos and videos, so that the items they sell look much more-attractive and cool. Even though it is not uncommon for the products to be taken from wholesalers in Tanah Abang.

According to several traders at Tanah Abang Market, one of them, HR, said that they have not yet understood the tips to attract more buyers. On average, all they have done so far is upload photos of their products to online platforms and wait for them to sell. Their challenge is their limited technological skills or what is commonly referred to as gaptek (Bisniscom, October 13, 2023). With this phenomenon, it is necessary to address and plan efforts so that traditional traders in Pasar Tanah Abang are able to adapt and survive in the midst of change so that they can compete with their competitors. The practical implications for long-term planning will have an impact on traders and on consumer shopping behavior which is increasingly shifting to online platforms. One strategy that can be applied is to integrate offline and online (omnichannel) strategies. Merchants in Pasar Tanah Abang can start by strengthening their presence on existing e-commerce platforms or even using social media as a sales tool. This way, they are not only dependent on direct market visits, but can also reach out to consumers from all over Indonesia.

In addition, digital training for traditional traders is essential. The government and merchant associations can work together to organize classes or training on online sales strategies, logistics management, and digital marketing. With the knowledge gained from these trainings, merchants will be better prepared to face competition in the digital era. Although it takes time and investment, this adaptation can be successful with the right approach and support from the government and community. Thus, traditional merchants can remain competitive and not lose out to digital businesses.

One of the most important aspects of this LSC trend is the affordability of information technology on the TikTok live streaming platform, which according to research conducted by Maghfiroh et al (2023), the affordability factor of information technology on TikTok live streaming is a factor that influences users in live streaming shopping activities. In the study, it was also stated that there are several factors that have an impact on customer purchase interest when using the live streaming shopping feature in the TikTok application, namely visibility, metavoicing, shopping guidance through immersion, and presence. Technological adaptation needs to be followed up immediately so that merchants can promote and sell their products so that they can be better known by the public in a broad sense through the integration of online and offline channels.

The New Awakening of Tanah Abang Market Traders

A number of media reports on the situation and condition of Tanah Abang Market, which has experienced a drastic decline in visitors, have in fact been able to motivate traders to revive the original trade vibes. Some of the marketing tactics applied by the merchants there are seen to be following the development of trends and the enthusiasm of buyers. In recent years, Bangkok's clothing trends and fashion styles have been in high demand. This inspired the Tanah Abang Market merchants to come up with an unprecedented shopping concept called "Little Bangkok". This shopping trend was uploaded by several Pasar Tanah Abang merchants who have Instagram accounts, displaying Little Bangkok activities that offer imported merchandise from Thailand and China. The resurgence of activity in Little Bangkok is a trigger that brings back customers to Pasar Tanah Abang who still want to get the thrill and experience of shopping offline. Along with this new trend, the government's policy to open trade through the Tiktok platform was positively welcomed by MSME players. This is because Tiktok has also carried out a strategic collaboration with the Tokopedia marketplace which currently manages shopping services on Tiktok. This collaboration is predicted to be able to increase and empower the power of digital platforms to grow businesses and small and medium enterprises which will later be able to move the wheels of the economy which had dimmed and harmed many business people. (liputan6.com, Jan 15, 2024).

Furthermore, the revival of trade in Pasar Tanah Abang can be seen from various theoretical perspectives, namely (1) Market Theory, emphasizing the importance of a large and diverse market to facilitate trade. As one of the largest markets in Southeast Asia, Pasar Tanah Abang attracts many buyers and traders due to the availability of various products at competitive prices. (Robbins, et al 2017), (2) Location Theory, focuses on how important strategic location is to attract customers and support businesses to conduct transactions. Tanah Abang Market is located in the center of Jakarta, making it easily accessible from various regions thus increasing its trade growth (Kotler & Keller, 2016), (3) Innovation Theory, which emphasizes how important innovation is to adapt to changing technology and lifestyles. Traders in Tanah Abang Market use innovations such as LSC trade flows to increase market share and increase sales (Christensen, 2013), (4) Small Business Development Theory, emphasizing factors such as access to capital, management capabilities, and government support that can help SMEs as an effort to increase competitiveness and business capacity (Hisrich et al, 2017), and (5) Customer Relationship Theory, highlighting how important good relationships with customers are to increase loyalty and maintain loyalty. Traders in Tanah Abang Market strive to maintain their customer base by providing good service, competitive prices, and products with satisfactory quality, Gronroos, C. (1990).

E. CONCLUSIONS

The economic slowdown due to the pandemic and post-Covid has caused traders in conventional markets, especially in Tanah Abang Market, to experience an increasingly significant decline in income. This situation has led to a new trend of shopping, utilizing live streaming features on social media and e-commerce. This social commerce model is a solution to help boost sales and increase the number of buyers. Although it was rejected, traders in Tanah Abang Market had to accept the fact that live shopping and the option of trading through online shops are what today's consumers prefer, and need to be done to complement the trade channels of every business actor. Government support for the LSC trend is also a solution, although MSME entrepreneurs still need assistance and training to become more skilled in optimizing the use of digital media. The revival of trade in Tanah Abang and the adaptations made by its business actors can be reviewed according to several theories, including market theory, location theory, innovation theory, small business development theory, and customer relationship theory to obtain a more-complete and clear picture of the current situation and consumer behavior.

Suggestions that can be given regarding business communication strategies facing the LSC trend can be given as practical and academic advice. Skills, attractiveness, aesthetics, and creativity of streamers are very important to attract attention and trigger the desire to buy by consumers, therefore optimizing the use of technology and features in live streaming shopping is very necessary. As an academic suggestion, there needs to be further research related to the business implications of e-commerce, digital business model development, as well as business models that use live streaming features.

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