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Research Article

Digital Marketing Strategy for Medical Supplier Company in Covid-19 Pandemic Era

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ABSTRACT

In the covid-19 global pandemic era, many countries apply restriction for many offline activities in order to prevent virus spread. This affected many business and force them to go online. Every business have to adapt and adopt technology within this pandemic situation. One of the business whose product demand are increasing, is a medical supplier company. But this increase not only in the matter of demand, but also competitor and product variation. Existing company should run digital transformation to secure and expand their position on the market. This paper explain digital marketing communication strategies which conducted by medical supplier company in covid-19 pandemic era. The company make use of some platform for the initial digital marketing strategy, such as social media activation, company website, and e-commerce. Result shows that digital marketing plays important role for product sales escalation. Company can promote their business and establish customer relationship through various digital channel. However, e-commerce strategy seems more challenging for medical supplier company. This paper could help other business to determine their suitable digital marketing communication strategy.

Keywords: Digital marketing, Digital transformation, Marketing communication, Marketplace

Introduction

Covid-19 pandemic extremely change many aspects of human life: how we socialize, work, school, travel, and also shop. Some people became more aware of their health and maintain the health protocol. Indonesia government had set some regulation to prevent Covid-19 spread, known as 6M i.e. 1) Wearing mask, 2)

Washing hand using soap, 3) Keep the distance, 4) Avoiding crowd, 5) Lessen mobility, and 6) Avoiding eating together [1]. The pandemic and its regulation invent new lifestyle and needs, such as mask, hand sanitizer, also some medical equipment: oximeter, oxygen tube, personal protective equipment (or called APD

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in Indonesia), swab tools package for covid-19 test, syringe, etc.

The pandemic and changing lifestyle, theoretically, profitable for medical supplier company. Their prevalent products become prominent and urgently needed globally. In addition, many product variations emerging with high demand. One of Indonesia's issuer whom distribute medical equipment, recorded gaining up to 100% profit increase [2]. Another company declare six times sales growth during pandemic [3]. But in fact, this condition be concomitant with increase of new company, or even individual, who entering niche and attempt to gain profit. The existing medical company who started their business before pandemic mostly registered themselves to Ministry of Health to gain legal certificate/permission. They provide some legal product that safety guaranteed as well [4]. But suddenly, many seller joining the market, with or without legal certificate, and potentially disrupt the price market to persuade buyer. These new seller often found on marketplace or social media. It makes competition in medical supplier market become tighter and more challenging. The rapid change and rise in competition could be seen as either threat or challenge. Earlier medical company should apply some strategies to secure their business in the market.

In this pandemic situation many people spend their time mostly at home, since government set the restriction to prevent virus spread. Work from home, school from home, online meeting, become daily routine of pandemic life. It makes increase in screen time and internet penetration. Based on survey in Indonesia, internet penetration in the beginning of

Covid-19 pandemic increase for 8.9% [5]. Moreover, Indonesia government striving to accelerate digital transformation with Indonesia Digital Roadmap 2021-2024, that contain 4 strategic sectors: 1) Infrastructure, 2) Government, 3) Economic, and 4) Digital society [6]. Combination of these circumstances are suitable for medical supplier company to expand their marketing strategy into digital marketing.

Methods

Competition in marketing are inevitable. What company/brand should do is define their suitable strategy to win their targeted consumer. For medical supplier company, their primary targeted consumers are health worker or health institution such as hospital and clinic. But in the pandemic situation, the targeted consumer become wider. They may targeted into, not only health worker and institution, but also individual, office, company or institution who should provide health essentials for their workers. It is a good moment for medical supplier company to apply some digital marketing strategy in order to increase their sales, and necessarily, to compete with new seller in health essentials market.

PT. Manunggal Indah Lestari is a medical supplier company who distribute and supply health essentials and laboratory instrument with legal certificate from Indonesia Ministry of Health. They provide various product regularly needed on medical purpose, such as hematology analyzer, glucometer, syringe, HCG or pregnancy test, rapid test, reagent, rotator shaker, tube, microscope, etc.

The screenshot shows a search results page for 'manunggal indah lestari' on the KEMENKES website. The search bar at the top contains the text 'manunggal indah lestari'. Below the search bar, there are two search results, both of which are highlighted with a yellow box. The first result is for 'PT. MANUNGGAJ INDAH LESTARI' with the sertifikat number 'FK.01.01/2/5512-e/2021'. The second result is for 'PT. MANUNGGAJ INDAH LESTARI' with the sertifikat number 'FK.01.01/2/5512-e/2021'. Both results show the company's address as 'Jl. Elang San Selatan Blok N-17, Mangun Harjo, Prov. Jawa Tengah, Kota Semarang, Kec. Tembalang'. The results are displayed in a table format with columns for 'No', 'Nama Perusahaan', 'Nomor Sertifikat', 'Kelompok Produk', 'Verifikasi', and 'Sumber Data'. The 'Verifikasi' column shows 'Sudah Terverifikasi' and the 'Sumber Data' column shows 'SERTIFIKASI ALKES TERBIT'.

Figure 1. Manunggal Indah Lestari Legal Permission Information

The company founded on 2010, developed from family business into a limited company. In 2021, the company has two branches, in Jakarta and Semarang. Manunggal Indah Lestari establish partnership with many hospitals and clinics in Jabodetabek (Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, Bekasi) and several cities in Java. For almost 10 years, the company survive with traditional marketing and email marketing, such as offering and presenting their product from one hospital to another. But in 2020, covid-19 pandemic and rapid competition in health essentials market force them to go digital. Therefore PT. Manunggal Indah Lestari running some experiment with various digital marketing strategies to be able to compete with another company and seller.

Digital Marketing

Digital marketing simply defined as marketing using digital and online tools. As technology revolution affect everyday life, where people connected and networked using internet, marketing strategy complemented, or even shifted, from traditional marketing into digital marketing. Digital marketing become essential in this web 5.0 era, which marked by the advent of new automated technologies and connectivity innovations [7]. Ryan (2014) asserted that without digital marketing, marketer might miss opportunities and lose business therefore it is important to formulate digital marketing strategy that can help marketer to make decisions, and ensure that the efforts are focused and relevant to the business and consumer [8].

In addition, Ryan (2014) suggest the components that will help marketer determine their marketing strategy [8]:

1. Knowing the business

Is the business ready to embrace digital marketing? Are the product suitable for online promotion? Are the team, technology, and infrastructure for digital marketing ready?

2. Knowing the competition

Who are the main competitors in the digital marketplace, are they the same as the offline competitors? What are they doing in digital marketing? What lesson can be obtained from their digital marketing strategy? Is there an opportunity for our business? Since

competition in digital world is not geographically limited. Technology allow us to reach out broader geographical market, so does competitors technology, which means competition is not locally anymore.

3. Knowing the customer

Who is the customer and what they want from our business? Are the targeted customer online will be same with the offline customer, or will target new demographic customer? What is your customer's online habit, and how to engage with them?

4. Knowing what they want to achieve

It is important to set clear, measurable, and achievable goals for digital marketing strategy. Is the goal is generating online sales, or creating a source of targeted sales leads, or improving brand awareness?

5. Knowing how they are doing

How is the digital marketing process? Are one platform delivering more traffic than another? Why? How about the conversion rates, how much of that increased traffic results in tangible value to the business? Digital marketer should measure, refine, re-measure continuously.

Result and Discussion

PT. Manunggal Indah Lestari – will be written Manunggal subsequently –initiate digital marketing strategy for their medical supplier company in 2021, due to the fierce competition during Covid-19 pandemic. The main objective of the digitalization project is increasing sales. In offline marketing, Manunggal's targeted consumers are health institution such as hospital, clinic, and reseller. While in digital marketing, the targeted consumers is expanded for the reason that since Covid-19 pandemic, demand of health equipment is not only coming from health institution, but also another institution and individual.

This initial digital marketing practice by Manunggal implemented on five platform that used primarily as promotion and branding channel: 1) Instagram, 2) Facebook, 3) Company website, 4) Whatsapp, and 5) E-Commerce. Each will be discussed below.

Based on annual survey by Hootsuite (We Are Social), reported that 73,7% of Indonesia population using internet. And among the most

used online platforms are Youtube, Whatsapp, and Instagram. While online activities that spend most of their time are watching online video, accessing social media, using chat apps or messenger, music, game, and shopping apps [9]. These user increase and technology development could help brand/ marketer/ businessman to utilize online platform to increase their revenue. For Manunggal, the platform chosen in their digital marketing strategy has differentiation that could attract different consumer. According to Katz (2010), utilization of several platforms would transmit marketing message via several media, to reach specific audience in each platform and take advantage of every medium [10].

1. Instagram

Instagram is 3rd most used platform in Indonesia with 85 million users that can be reached [9]. In this project, Instagram account of Manunggal, @manunggal.indahlestari, responsible for promotion, branding, and showing product catalog. Manunggal's digital marketing team regularly post Instagram content, consist of feed, story, and offer via direct message. The direct message strategy is quite similar with e-mail marketing, which is highly targeted, personalized, and intended to build consumer relationship [11]. Instagram marketing particularly intended for individual consumer, as new target of Manunggal's product in the digital marketing.

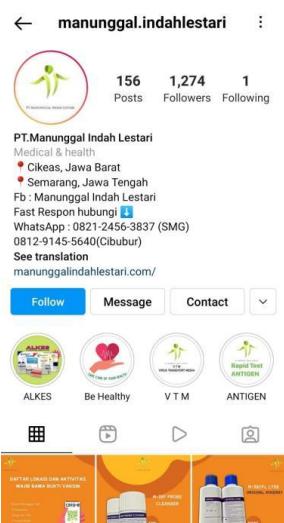


Figure 2. Screenshot of Manunggal's Instagram account

For feeds post, content arranged by pillar content. Content pillars are 3 to 5 topics the brand will consistently discuss, amplify, and create content for on social media. Content pillars would help marketer to get clarity on their brand niche, and also simplify content planning [12]. In Manunggal's Instagram, content consist of five pillars: 1) Product knowledge, 2) Health news, 3) Health education, 4) Fun facts, and 5) Company activity. Every content production started with planning, continued to taking photo, designing, posting, and evaluating. Sometimes, feed content also posted on instastory to increase engagement. Engagement and insight are part of weekly evaluation. Social media insight, especially Instagram, can be count from number of followers, impression, reach, likes, comment, saved, engagement, views [13]. For conversion purpose, Manunggal's Instagram provide Whatsapp number and serve purchase via Instagram direct message. This Instagram experiment appear to be success, seen from its number of followers and prospective direct message.

2. Facebook

Facebook is 4th most used social media, and 5th most visited website in Indonesia [9]. Facebook account of Manunggal used to promote product, publish company activities, and purchase channel as well. Since facebook are created to connect people, especially that people whom engage with user [14], Manunggal don't use facebook for business account. Instead, using regular account and try to actively engage through related groups on facebook, such as health group and communities. Manunggal's marketing team routinely uploading new product photos, monthly promo, and company activities such as packing and delivering products.

Facebook is known as popular social media among seniors and adults [9]. It is valid and occur in Manunggal's case, where Manunggal's facebook seems busier than Instagram and its friends/connection dominated with adults age, ranged from individuals searching for health equipment to hospital/clinic/reseller companies. Its indicate that facebook successfully deliver marketing messages to Manunggal's targeted consumer which may lead to sales.



Figure 3. Screenshot of Manunggal's Facebook Post

3. Company website

To be a trustful company, Manunggal need to have their own website. Kotler & Armstrong (2014) stated that the first step in conducting online marketing is to create website [11]. But the most important thing after creating website is designing attractive website that can drag

consumers to visit, stay around, and come back often. Manunggal's company website developed to be source of company profile and e-catalog, and linked to whatsapp contact for purchase interest. Website's user interface (UI) made simple dan clear with company's mandatory colour.

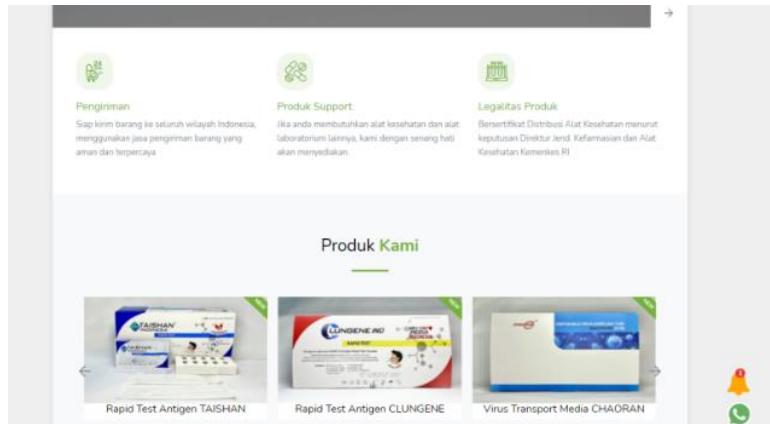


Figure 4. Screenshot of Manunggal's Company Website

Nevertheless, website relatively difficult to maintain compared to social media. Since digital marketing team is not person who is expert in programming language, Manunggal hire third party to handle it. Manunggal's website shows only few products and lack of feature. It did not provide any interactive column such as chat, nor online purchase. The product shown in website's catalog is not updated and still lack of essential information such as price. The web

provide only hyperlink that linked to Whatsapp contact.

Company website can be categorized into two forms: corporate/brand website and marketing website. Corporate website aimed to build customer goodwill, collect customer feedback, and supplement other sales channels rather than to sell its product directly. While marketing website, in the other hand, interact with consumers to persuade them, which lead to direct purchase or other marketing objective

[11]. Manunggal's website, cannot be categorized as marketing website for their absence of interactivity and direct purchase. Nor inchoate as corporate website owing to the fact that their website's lack of building consumer relationship.

4. Whatsapp

Whatsapp is most used mobile apps and 2nd most used social media in Indonesia 2021 [9].

Most of Manunggal's transaction, customer relations, and many aspects related to communication done on Whatsapp. Manunggal's customer become friends of Manunggal's admin on Whatsapp as well. Thus, use of Whatsapp marketing become prominent. The strategy is keeping relationship with customer by giving offer via personal chat and share banner ads via Whatsapp status.

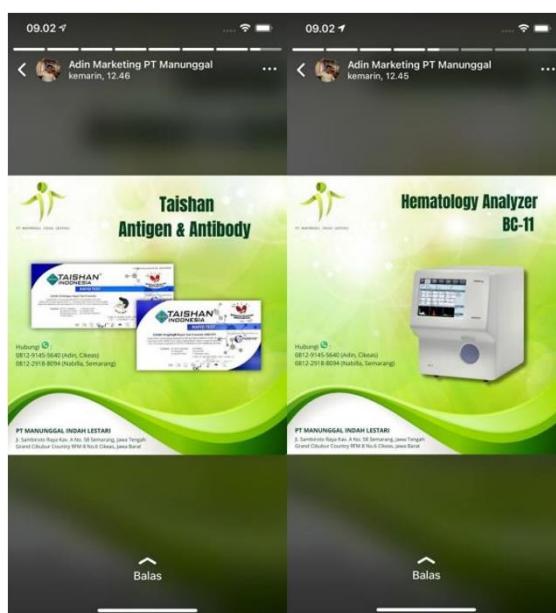


Figure 5. Screenshot of Manunggal's Ads on Whatsapp Story

The personal chat strategy, once more, quite similar with e-mail marketing which is very personalized. Corporate consumer such as hospital, clinic, and reseller were more likely to make repeat order/purchase. Whatsapp personal chat could help Manunggal to maintain their relationship with them, by giving personal offer, monthly promo, or new product information. Another strategy, Whatsapp status, help Manunggal in reaching consumer as well by using display ads.

5. E-commerce

The last treatment in this digital marketing experiment is e-commerce. E-commerce is the use of communication networks and computer to carry out business processes. Using e-commerce, operational costs can be suppressed [15], increases advertising, and allows broader scope of segments [16]. Survey by Hootsuite

(2021) reported that 78,2% people in Indonesia accessing shopping apps via mobile phone. Shopee and Tokopedia, among the popular e-commerce in Indonesia, are ranked 4th and 6th most used mobile apps [17]. E-commerce allows communication and product offering to people globally, with 24 hours operation, and allows people to shop anytime [16]. These reason encourage Manunggal to sell their product on e-commerce. Shopee and Tokopedia were chosen as initial e-commerce marketing. Turn out selling health equipment on e-commerce is not easy despite Manunggal's legal permission from Ministry of Health. It was e-commerce rules to prevent illegal distribution of health equipment in this pandemic situation.

However, e-commerce market still appealing and advantageous. Therefore, Manunggal will try to sell some of their product through their subsidiaries, Bakael Alkes. The product

provided by Bakoe Alkes are general product that registered already in Ministry of Health and regularly needed in pandemic situation such as mask, hand sanitizer, oximeter, sphygmomanometer, etc.

Conclusion

PT. Manunggal Indah Lestari initiate digital marketing strategy in response of high demand and tight competition of health equipments during Covid-19 pandemic. There are 5 platform used with each characteristic that differ in terms of audience, promotion strategy, conversion, i.e. Instagram, Facebook, Company website, Whatsapp, and E-commerce.

After several months of digital marketing practices reported that individual customer were more handled via Instagram, showed by increasing number of individual followers. Its conversion is relatively straightforward, since purchase can be made in-apps. While institution customer were more suitable for Facebook, marked by various institution and reseller company account who make friends with Manunggal in Facebook, and actively respond Manunggal's Facebook post. In the other hand, Whatsapp prevail over them since Whatsapp

can reach both individual and institution customers. Whatsapp story feature provide display ads that specifically targeted; and whatsapp chat can serve as direct marketing, personal selling, and conversion tracking. Unfortunately, e-commerce strategy cannot run well as planned due to e-commerce regulation that restrict health equipment sale on their apps. Manunggal should change their strategy in e-commerce market, by engage their subsidiaries. Another Manunggal's digital marketing strategy, company website, is need further develop to be a successful marketing channel. The website should be attract consumer and give them what they want to search through.

In general, product sales of Manunggal were increased during pandemic. Company responded with focusing the product on Covid essentials. Demand and purchase coming from partner (hospital and clinic), reseller, institution/company, and individual. But sales escalated drastically during PPKM or restrictions on community activities arranged by government. PPKM occur during July caused by high number of Covid-19 infected people. This make demand and sales increased significantly. But in the next month, sales decrease because the momentum has passed.

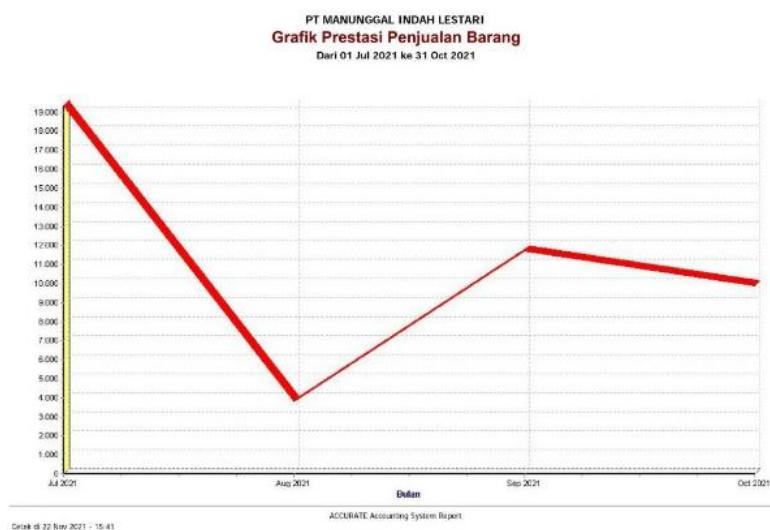


Figure 6. Manunggal's Sales Chart July-October 2021

The main thing is, no single strategy could fit every business. Manunggal, and other marketer, should do trial and error to find their suitable platform and strategy mix to reach

their consumer. Ryan (2014) pointed out that digital marketing is not actually about technology, it is all about people (marketer) connecting with other people (consumer) to build

relationship and ultimately drive sales. What works on one business might not run well in other business with other consumer, vice versa.

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Competing interests

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