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Digital Transformation Business Strategy in Post Covid-19

## THE NETNOGRAPHIC PORTRAIT: COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGES OF MSME'S RETAIL BUSINESS VIA "WAG" DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Ema Nurzainul Hakimah<sup>1\*</sup>, Sri Aliami<sup>2</sup>, Basthoumi Muslih<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1, 2, 3</sup>Faculty of Economy & Business, University of Nusantara PGRI Kediri, Kediri, Indonesia

\*Corresponding Author: emanurzainul@unpkediri.ac.id

**Abstract:** This study is driven by the online businesses growing rapidly using WhatsApp Group (WAG) which is intentionally created by business actors or village apparatus or by agencies that drive the public's economy such as the city/district cooperative and MSME's offices (DinKop), even by community organizations such as Muslimat NU. There is no business motive for admins or WAG makers, yet rather to provide space and solutions to sustaining the public's economy during Covid-19 Pandemic. The problem is how retailers become competitive in a market that does not implement a sales, payment, and transaction system. This study aims to show the reality of digital business which has undergone a massive transformation due to Covid-19 pandemic pressure since the edge of 2019. This study is qualitative research, where the main data is obtained from the public community in social media, WhatsApp Group (WAG). Netnography is used as a research method to elevate the reality of life in a digital/internet-based technology society. The data analysis results that derived from capture and confirmation of sources indicate that to be competitive, MSME's retail must carry out several business strategies, including: having an electronic communication strategy in the form of unique and attractive visuals and word choice, competitive pricing strategies, increasing service responsiveness, updating WAG information consistently, and maintaining an E-WOM constantly positive on social media.

**Keywords:** MSME's, Netnography, Retail Business

#### 1. Introduction

For more than 2 years, the world has felt the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Various society are struggling together, hand in hand in order to be able to deal with conditions that are extremely influential in the order of people's lives, especially in the economic sector of the MSME's business sector. In Indonesia, MSME's have been significantly impacted in the midst of Covid-19 pandemic. Bank Indonesia said as many as 87.5% of MSME's were affected by Covid-19 pandemic. Of this amount, about 93.2% of them have a negative impact on the sales side (Saputra, 2021). In fact, one of the economic strengths that has been supporting the Indonesian economy and regional economic strength is the presence of business actors, micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME's) (Febriyantoro, 2018).

The Covid-19 pandemic does not only have a negative impact, but also a positive impact in terms of technological developments. In the era of the digital economy, digital disruption triggers a digital business model. The term digital disruption indicates the occurrence of a new



companies and customers (Omotosho, 2020).

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business model when digital technology affects changes in the value of business transactions (Ariyanto et al., 2021). Modern society takes advantage of technological sophistication in addition to communicating and seeking information, as well as an effort to develop the economy. This can be seen from the increasingly widespread online buying and selling system (Triadi & Darnita, 2021). Over the last few years, social media platforms have become the main choice used by marketers to sell products and maintain their existence. Social media is no longer just a tool for interacting or socializing in cyberspace, but has become a very efficient and effective business tool. Business people no longer have to struggle to offer door-to-door products or exhibitions and stand rentals in malls. Selling through social media is certainly the

Referring to Hootsuite's "we are social" survey-based data, the social media platform that is widely used 2022 in Indonesia is Whatsapp. Whatsapp users in Indonesia are 88.7% of the total population, up from 87.7% in the previous year.

right step for MSME's because it does not require large costs to open a shop (Ariyanto et al., 2021). This is related to the perceived benefits of being more practical and efficient for both

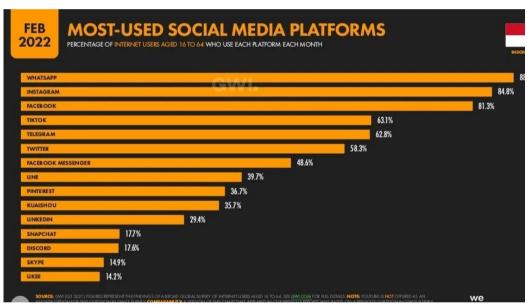


Figure 1: Users Persentage of Social Media *Platform*Source: Hootsuite, 2022

The survey results indicate that the majority of Indonesians feel comfortable using Whatsapp social media and it is easier to apply compared to other social media platforms. In fact, the presence of Whatsapp Business service for small businesses and Whatsapp Business API (Application Programming Interface) for medium and large scale businesses is believed to support the needs of business activities in the current digital era. The use of Whatsapp is so great that it can be seen in the number of Indonesian people who make Whatsapp Groups (WAG) as interaction forum between their communities.

The visible phenomenon is the large number of MSME's business actors in Indonesia consisting of small traditional retailers (retailers, grocery stores, home businesses, etc.). With all the limited knowledge and marketing innovations as well as increasingly fierce business competition, they felt difficult to sell their products. A good marketing strategy is needed to increase the competitive advantage of these retailers. One of them is using marketing communication strategy in WAG social media. The right marketing communication strategy is used to be able to reach the target market share so that it can increase sales (Pradiani, 2017). The use of social media emphasizes the importance of digital business strategies that are



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oriented towards changing the way we communicate, collaborate, consume, and create products (Garcia-Morales et al., 2017).

In response to the existing problems, business actors or village apparatus or agencies that drive the public's economy such as the city/district cooperative and MSME's offices (DinKop), even by community organizations such as Muslimat NU creates Whatsapp Groups (WAG). There is no business motive for the admins or WAG makers, but rather to provide space and solutions so that the community's economy can rise during Covid-19 pandemic. However, the question arises how can retailers be competitive in a market that does not implement a sales, payment, and transaction system like a marketplace? Therefore, this study aims to show the reality of the online retail business in Whatsapp Group (WAG) which is undergoing a massive transformation due to the pressure of Covid-19 pandemic.

#### 2. Literature Review

#### **Traditional Marketing Into Digital Marketing**

The rapid development of technology in recent years will eventually cause and encourage changes in marketing practices around the world. As is the case today, with technological developments, marketers adapt and utilize technology to make their marketing strategies successful (Kotler et al., 2017), which is the promotion aspect or promotional mix. Previously, marketers used conventional methods to advertise their products, such as using brochures and distributing them directly to their target market, now they prefer digitally (electronic files) and upload them on social media in the hope that they will be seen by a wider market and even the world. All forms of marketing activities that use electronic, digital/internet facilities are called digital marketing (Agung, 2021). Furthermore, why do marketers choose digital marketing?, the main reason is because consumer behavior has changed, so marketers must adapt and become relevant to changes in people's behavior.

#### **Consumer Behavior During Covid-19**

Critical situations force humans to behave in different directions with some aspects of behavior that cannot be avoided. The Covid-19 pandemic is not a normal crisis, to control its spread several policies must be carried out including social restrictions, local lockdowns, and the Enforcement of Community Activity Restrictions (PPKM). As a result of this policy, business actors and consumers became very depressed, as a result of which economic instability created market dynamics and the transformation of consumer behavior (Mehta et al., 2020). Public pressure during Covid-19 pandemic has caused changes in consumer shopping habits, consumer spending behavior and priorities. At the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic, around January – July 2021, consumers prioritize shopping for health needs (supplements, masks, hand sanitizers, herbal medicines). The desire to shop at the mall or go far from home which is usually done while refreshing cannot be done, so you have to switch to a store near your home, shop through social media, e-commerce platforms. Purchases over the internet or digitally have greatly increased during Covid-19 pandemic (Mehta et al., 2020; Roggeveen & Sethuraman, 2020; Sheth, 2020).

#### **Building Competitive Advantage with Social Media Marketing**

Competitive advantage in business can be created from several aspects, including implementing a low cost, so that the selling price is low compared to competitors. Another aspect that during the Covid-19 pandemic continued to be developed by business actors to create a competitive advantage was growth. The growth of markets and businesses that are under pressure and the dynamics of the endless economic crisis have encouraged business actors to adapt to the situation. The implementation of government policies in controlling the



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spread of the Covid-19 virus, starting from limiting store operating hours, limiting community activities by closing several tourist attractions and much more, motivates business actors to adapt to the situation. The shift in marketing activities occurred very quickly and was massively carried out by all business actors, especially small business actors. To survive and win the business competition in the conditions of economic's crisis during pandemic, adapting to technology and digitalization is the only thing that can be done. If previously using social media such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp as a medium of communication in social interaction, it has shifted to social media that functions as a marketing medium, or what is commonly called social media marketing (Agung, 2021). Before the Covid-19 pandemic, selling only in stores, now they are also sold online using social media and e-commerce.

The social media that is very easy to use and the most widely used or can be called the favorite social media of the Indonesian people is WhatsApp. Data from We Are Social and Hootsuite in 2019 stated that 83% of internet users in Indonesia were WhatsApp users. The advantages of WhatsApp compared to other social media for selling, including storing hundreds of contact numbers, it is very easy to communicate with customers about products, product promotion activities can be carried out by using the WhatsApp story feature, distribution is also very easy because couriers will be helped by the share location feature, can create groups for pelapak and also join other online sellers, and of course can be accessed via smartphone and computer. For small business actors, of course, this can be done because it does not require large investments and special skills, as long as there is internet and smartphones that can be installed with WhatsApp application, then the creation of sales growth advantages/market expansion can be done. Some tips to increase sales through WhatsApp application, including: 1) making business plans and targets, 2) using a special WhatsApp number for selling so that you can focus and be set for one business, namely selling, 3) collect as many contacts as possible starting from family, friends work and customers, 4) managing contacts, directed at product target contacts / potential product targets, 5) making a neat and up-to-date catalog, 6) utilizing WhatsApp stories, by creating story content with photos or videos so as to build viewer awareness, interest , desire, and action, 7) take advantage of broadcast messages, 8) reply to messages quickly, fast response, 9) establish good relationships with customers, by chat asking for services and products that have been purchased, testimonials and also messages so that marketers' business efforts more advanced, and 10) consistent, maintaining consistency in business by keeping on trying, innovating and evaluating (Octian, 2022).

#### 3. Method

The context of the development of digital culture focuses on the combination of the relationship between aspects of humanism and digital technology. Reveal how humans interact with various kinds of digitization, how humans behave in the context of technology and how technology is used by humans. In the context of human-centered marketing, netnography provides a great way to discover what is happening in the acceptance of a product/brand and drive the digital community market. One of the methods for obtaining data from the digital community, which is currently being used and continues to develop as a result of Covid-19 pandemic, is the development of netnographic research methods.

Developed by Robert Kozinets, netnography is a method adapted for understanding human behavior in online communities, as a practice of internet-focused ethnography (Kozinets, 2010). Netnography is used by Kozinets in the marketing field, as in this study, the netnographic method was chosen to reveal the reality of the internet community which has its own culture. In this study is a community of online sellers and consumers consisting of MSME's business actors and their consumers who use WAG (WhatsApp Group) as a medium for online selling.



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This type of research is qualitative research, where researchers try to photograph and understand the phenomena experienced by MSME's actors and various things such as their attitudes and behavior during the economic crisis due to Covid-19 Pandemic (Moleong, 2017). Formulation of the problem, how MSME's actors does online business during Covid-19 Pandemic with WAG media?. This study uses an interpretive paradigm, researchers have the aim of understanding the reality of MSME's online business with WAG as an effort to move the economy during Covid-19 Pandemic with a research focus (WAG) as an online marketing medium for MSME's during Covid-19 Pandemic (Mulawarwan et al., 2021). Based on the formulation of the problem, the subjects of this research are MSME's business actors who sell online using WAG during Covid-19 pandemic with the site or seller online community of WAG.

The analytical stages in netnographic research (Kozinets, 2010), consist of six stages: 1) coding, 2) making reflections on the code, 3) abstracting and comparing, 4) checking and refinement, 5) generalization, which describes a small number of generalizations that are made. Include or explain consistency in data, 6) Theorizing, intended to deal with generalizations gathered from data with formal knowledge using constructs or theories; build new theories in close coordination, both with data analysis and relevant existing knowledge. Test the validity of the data using technical triangulation, which is to test the credibility of the data by checking the validity of the data to the same source with different techniques (interviews via telephone and chat WhatsApp/WAG) and also source triangulation; checking data that has been obtained through several sources.

#### 4. Result and Discussion

Based on observations on the social media of MSME's business actors who are members of WAGs where researchers are scouts or *lurking*, and at the same time as a research instrument involved in extracting in-depth information/confirmation (chat) with informants, from the stages of data analysis, several data can be obtained findings. There were 3 WAGs observed in this study, starting from middle to last February 2022, along with the implementation of PPKM levels 1 to 3 by the City and Regency governments of Kediri due to the development of the Omicron variant of Covid-19 case. The three WAGs that became the observation sites in this study were WAG of KEDIRI ONLINE COOKING, WAG of TOSEM MNU PAC KANDAT, and WAG of JUAL BELI NGRECO-KANDAT. With an interpretive paradigm approach, understanding and meaning will be presented on the reality of marketing via WAG social media carried out by MSME's actors without doing construction or criticizing it.

The results of *lurking* for approximately one month from the three WAGs, found several things that can be described and interpreted based on the results of the capture/image in the interaction/message space on the WAG.

#### a. WAG of COOKING ONLINE KEDIRI



Figure 2: WAG Profile



**Figure 3: Product Posting** Source: WAG of Cooking Online Kediri, 2022



Figure 4: Persuasive Message



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Figure 1 explains that in the WAG of COOKING ONLINE KEDIRI was created by admin, Mrs. Arya, as an owner of food processing business (vegetables and side dish) on April 8, 2021 and there are 45 members recorded there, there are no terms and regulations set by the admin to become members in the group.

Figure 2 explains that every day the admin of the WAG of COOKING ONLINE KEDIRI will provide information about the menu, prices and update the availability of vegetables and side dishes, display photos, videos and also from the picture it can be seen that there is a consumer who asks Mrs. Diah about the next day's menu on at 10.10 WIB, and answered with a menu display, menu information and prices by the admin at 10.17 WIB. This shows that MSME's actors/admins provide information consistently, continuously and responsively to their consumers. The visuals of the product, which are often in the form of photos and videos, are made quite attractive by the admin, so that the display and information in the message column becomes interesting.

Figure 3 explains that in addition to updating information about menus and menu supplies, very often the admin provides information about processing methods, it can be seen in the image on February 1, 2022, at 17.32 WIB, the admin posts tips for storing processed foods belonging to Cooking Online Kediri.

#### b. WAG of TOSEM MNU PAC KANDAT







Figure 5: WAG Profile

**Figure 6: Product Offers** 

Figure 7: Services

Source: WAG of Tosem MNU PAC Kandat, 2022

Figure 5 explains that the WAG of TOSEM MNU PAC KANDAT, created by admin Ema Hakimah on October 11, 2021, is a joint venture owned by Muslimat NU, a subsidiary of the Kandat sub-district, Kediri district which provides the needs of NU Muslim members in the form of basic necessities in particular. It has 39 members who, apart from being shop managers, are also SME's entrepreneurs, such as sempol food, coffee, honey and others. In this profile there are no rules or regulations made by the admin to regulate the procedures for becoming a WAG member and also trading procedures in the group.

Picture 6 is an image that shows that every day sometimes before 6 am, or in this picture it can be seen at 14.00 WIB, the admin informs the names and prices of goods sold by TOSEM, along with photos of the products. However, not all products are visually displayed by the admin, only new products and products that specifically require visuals and sizes only.

Figure 7 provides evidence of how admins provide services to their customers, answer questions and respond to complaints submitted by customers. It can be seen from the time of asking and responding, which is an average of less than 15 minutes or never more than 1 hour, in the picture it can be seen that Mrs. Suraten asked at 19.11 WIB and the admin answered at 19.23 WIB, as well as if there were complaints from customers, it can be seen from the picture that the admin provides an explanation with polite words and always apologizes "ngapunten".



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#### c. WAG of JUAL BELI NGRECO-KANDAT







Figure 9: Product Offers

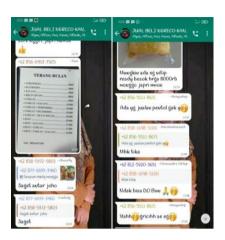


Figure 10: Services

Source: WAG of Jual Beli Ngreco-Kandat, 2022

Figure 8 describes that WAG of JUAL BELI NGRECO-KANDAT was created by Aini Fakhor, on May 13, 2020 totaling 257 members, there are rules made to be agreed and implemented by group members, the group is only for sharing prices and products with a maximum of 5 photos or collage, the next transaction is through private chat, it is forbidden to send messages other than selling and there are distribution rules that must be carried out in the Ngreco area.

Figure 9 shows that several food processing MSME's actors, namely lontong sellers, offer their wares with collage photos at 11.23 and fresh fish sellers, namely Ms. Vivin, offer their wares at the same time only with the words various types of fish without any prices and pictures.

Figure 10 explains that there is an interaction between actors and customers to manage the delivery time of orders and how MSME business actors respond quickly to customer requests. As was done by the lontong seller who responded to a purchase from Mrs. Mawarti at 13.06 WIB to be delivered to her home in Joho, and was approved at 13.07 WIB by the lontong seller to be delivered to Joho as ordered.

The three WAGs were created with the aim of conducting business activities, after being described, several themes can be obtained which become codes/themes which can then be analyzed, are: 1) rules in WAG, 2) price competition, 3) product competition similar, and 4) promotion and service strategies, in which these things are a problem for these business actors to compete with fellow business actors in the WAG. Analyzed according to the stages in netnography analysis (Kozinets, 2010), it can be tabled as follows:

Tabel 1. Themes Analysis In Netnography

Reflection	Abstract/	Checking/	Generalisation	Theorizing
	Comparison	Improvement		8
In detail, the rules for becoming a member are written, procedures for transactions, procedures for offering	Facilitate growth by expanding the market or market share of MSME actors	MSME actors feel benefited, but there must still be an admin who regulates so that ethics in selling online can support a healthy climate	Like social media marketing, WAG has advantages and disadvantages, but can be used if there are established	It needs to be compiled, reviewed to be determined and agreed upon by WAG members, as is Ethics in the marketing 4.0 business
t t	rules for becoming a member are written, procedures for ransactions, procedures for	rules for by expanding the market or market or market share of MSME actors brocedures for ransactions, procedures for offering	In detail, the rules for by expanding the market or market share of MSME actors but there must still be an admin written, actors who regulates so that ethics in selling online can support a healthy offering MSME actors  MSME actors but there must still be an admin who regulates so that ethics in selling online can support a healthy climate	In detail, the Facilitate growth by expanding the peccoming a market or market but there must marketing, share of MSME actors but there must marketing, still be an admin written, actors who regulates so advantages and that ethics in that ethics in procedures for a support a healthy offering climate by expanding the feel benefited, media marketing, written who regulates so advantages and disadvantages, but can be used if there are established



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Reflection	Abstract/ Comparison	Checking/ Improvement	Generalisation	Theorizing
ethics in selling online	•	•		(Kotler et al., 2017)
Live prices and hidden prices	Impact of price competition which is sometimes unhealthy	The price should be hidden because it can be informed after a private chat is done	Always going well in the conventional market, but getting sharper in the online market	MSME actors need to understand pricing strategies (Kotler, 2005)
Creativity and innovation in creating products	Choose a superior product in the WAG you enter	Have superior products every day	Always going well in the conventional market, but getting sharper in the online market	MSME's actors need to understand product strategy (Tjiptono, 2015)
Creativity and innovation in visuals and word choice in offering products, and managing customer service/ complaints	Requires consistency, innovation and mastery in designing visual/content marketing, and digital communication skills	Update product and service information in a variety of innovative and attractive ways	Become the main key that distinguishes between MSME actors when managed professionally	MSME actors need to understand promotion and service strategies in digital marketing (Agung, 2021; Octian, 2022)
	creativity and innovation in visuals and word choice in offering products, and managing customer service/	ethics in selling online  Live prices and hidden prices  Creativity and innovation in creating products  Creativity and innovation in visuals and word choice in offering products, and managing products, and managing customer service/  Ethics in selling comparison  Impact of price competition which is sometimes unhealthy  Choose a superior product in the WAG you enter  WAG you enter  Requires consistency, innovation and mastery in designing visual/content marketing, and digital communication	ethics in selling online  Live prices and hidden prices  Creativity and innovation in creating products  Creativity and innovation in offering products  Creativity and innovation in visuals and word choice in offering products, and managing products  Comparison  Improvement  The price should be hidden because it can be informed after a private chat is done  Choose a superior product in the WAG you enter  WAG you enter  Update product and service information in a variety of innovation and information in a variety of innovative and attractive ways marketing, and customer digital communication	ethics in selling online  Live prices and hidden prices  Competition which is sometimes unhealthy  Creativity and innovation in products  Creativity and innovation in visuals and word choice in offering products, and managing customer service/  Competition which is because it can be informed after a unhealthy  Creativity and innovation and information in a digital communication  Competition which is because it can be informed after a unhealthy  Definition which is because it can be conventional market, but getting sharper in the online market  Always going well in the conventional market, but getting sharper in the online market  Become the main key that distinguishes when managed professionally customer service/  Evaluation in the opinion wastery in designing innovative and digital communication  Creativity and innovation and digital communication  Creativity and innovation and information in a when managed professionally customer service/  Evaluation in the price should be hidden well in the conventional market, but getting sharper in the online market and distinguishes when managed professionally attractive ways when managed professionally customer service/

Source: Netnography Results, 2022

Along with digital disruption era, Whatsapp as a community idol to interacting with other people, has transformed into social media for marketing activities. If previously using social media such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp as a medium of communication in social interaction, it has shifted to social media that functions as a marketing medium, or what is commonly called social media marketing (Agung, 2021). The netnographic reality in table 1 presents the results of in-depth observations about the pattern of community activity in making sales to gain competitive advantages for their business. By following the rules made by the group admin, business actors who are members of the WAG are encouraged to behave ethically in carrying out their marketing activities. Likewise, creation and innovation are indispensable in creating new products wrapped in an attractive way of delivering information (unique and interesting word choice). Because, the delivery of attractive information can be used as an appropriate marketing communication strategy to be able to reach the target market share so as to increase sales (Pradiani, 2017).

The challenges that can also become a competitive advantage strategy for retail business actors in the WAG are consistency, innovation and mastery in designing visual/marketing content, and digital communication science. In addition, making a neat and up to date catalog, utilizing WhatsApp stories (building viewer awareness, interest, desire, and action), utilizing broadcast messages, responding messages quickly (fast response), establishing good relationships with customers (testimonials) (Octian, 2022). The purpose of this strategic aspect is to maintain an E-WOM constantly positive on social media, increase responsiveness in services and make the business look professionally managed. The use of social media emphasizes the importance of digital business strategies that are oriented towards changing the way we communicate, collaborate, consume, and create products (Garcia-Morales et al., 2017).



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#### 5. Conclusions

Referring to the data analysis derived from capture and confirmation of sources, it can be concluded that to be competitive, MSME's retailers must carry out several business strategies, including: having an electronic communication strategy in the form of unique and attractive visuals and word selection, competitive pricing strategies, improve responsiveness in services, update information consistently in WAG, and maintaining an E-WOM constantly positive on social media. The phenomenon of digital business using Whatsapp Group (WAG) can be a bridge of knowledge for SME's in retail sector so that they always develop their skills in mastering digital communication technology. The behavior of MSME's business actors can be different when compared to social media activities other than WhatsApp, this is a limitation of this research.

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Hoped that with research that elevates the reality of the business life of the MSME's community, various society (communities, government agencies etc.) can better facilitate small community business activities in Indonesia.

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