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2024
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**INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE
ON ACCOUNTING
& BUSINESS**

Ethics and Integrity in Accounting and Business: Building Trust in an Intricate World

ORGANISED BY:

**FACULTY OF ACCOUNTANCY, UiTM PERAK BRANCH
TAPAH CAMPUS**

In Collaboration With

PROCEEDINGS OF THE 2ND INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE ON ACCOUNTING AND BUSINESS

(ICAB2024)

Ethics and Integrity in Accounting and Business: Building Trust in an Intricate World

e ISBN 978-967-2776-35-2

FACULTY OF ACCOUNTANCY
UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA, PERAK BRANCH, TAPAH CAMPUS, MALAYSIA

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Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia

Cataloguing in Publication Data

No e-ISBN: 978-967-2776-35-2

Cover Design: Graphic Design and Web Page Team
Typesetting : ICAB 2024 Proceeding Team

The Strategy of Culinary MSMEs in Palembang City to Face COVID-19

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Abstract

This study aims to describe the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on culinary MSMEs in Palembang. It also describes the strategies applied to mitigate the impact of COVID-19. This research uses qualitative descriptive analysis methods. Data was collected from 7 respondents who are culinary MSME players in Palembang City. Each respondent was interviewed to reveal what impact they experienced in relation to the consequences due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The interviews were also intended to uncover the strategies they implemented to address those impacts. The strategy referred to in this study includes whether respondents use e-commerce, digital marketing, and customer relationship marketing. Each interview is recorded and a transcript is made. The analysis was carried out by identifying phrases from each interview result that indicated the phrases "impact of the COVID-19 pandemic" and "strategies to overcome the impact". The study showed that almost all respondents experienced the impact of declining income due to the COVID-19 pandemic, only one respondent said they were not affected. One respondent stated that he did not use e-commerce and relied on direct sales, while the other only used social media. In terms of marketing strategy, all respondents stated that they had used digital marketing and customer relationship marketing.

Keywords

COVID-19, Culinary, Descriptive, Qualitative, Small Business

1.0 Introduction

The ongoing problem of the COVID-19 pandemic that has never ended, especially affecting countries such as America, Spain, and Italy, can worsen economic conditions over time. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic certainly has an effect on Indonesia. Several institutions also revealed that this pandemic could cause a weakening of the world economy where the International Monetary Fund (IMF) predicts global economic growth to be at minus 3% (Ramaditya et al., 2023).

In Indonesia, MSMEs are considered as one of the backbones of the national economy, determining the future of Indonesia affected by this pandemic. Among several impacts on both MSMEs on a large and small scale that have been highlighted is a drastic decrease in turnover (Sari et al., 2023), and most MSME businesses not able to generate income (Sari et al., 2023). All MSME fields, whether culinary, services, crafts, or fashion, are all affected which makes business players feel disadvantaged by this pandemic (Sari et al., 2023). Not only that, but it also affects the MSME sector by limiting access to business funds due to economic weakness and declining productivity (Oktareza, 2020).

In the big city in Indonesia, Palembang City most of the economic activities generated by MSMEs, especially in the culinary sector one example is Palembang's typical food, namely *empek-empek*, as we

know empek-empek is an important icon as a tourist attraction and is expected to advance the economy in other fields such as tourism, transportation, fisheries, and others.

MSMEs in the area of Palembang continue to grow with the evidence of the wider competition and the ability to face market competition. The Head of the Cooperatives and Small and Medium Enterprises Office in the city of Palembang admitted that the growth of MSMEs grew rapidly, recorded in 2017 amounting to 97,311 MSMEs, then in 2018 it increased again to 162,981 MSMEs, then jumped again in 2019 to 163,291 and in 2020 it grew rapidly to 427 thousand which were the most spread in the city of Palembang and its surroundings (Suud, 2020). However, when this global disaster hit, it had a considerable impact on the business sector in Indonesia, especially for MSME players in Palembang City. For example, Inge (2020) stated that the sales revenue of empek-empek in Palembang City dropped by 70%. So that business players must find other ways and strategies so that their business continues to run, especially in the sale of empek-empek in the culinary sector in Palembang City. Among the alternative strategies to survive the impacts are, entrepreneurs selling empek-empek improve packaging into frozen packaging referred to as frozen food so that they can sell this empek-empek out of town through online sales and promote it on social media and they are forced to close their physical stores and switch to online sales in order to survive for the economy of these empek-empek seller business players.

Compared to normal conditions, the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic like this is indeed impacted on MSME operational activities and direct consumer spending. One way that can be done to overcome the COVID-19 situation is by selling products online through e-commerce, namely the transaction process of selling and buying products by utilizing an electronic system. In research, Hardilawati et al. (2019) concluded that e-commerce has a positive and significant effect on improving marketing performance and MSME revenue.

In addition to e-commerce transactions, MSME members must also be able to socialize their products in depth through the use of digital marketing and social media marketing to reach direct consumers and reduce the cost of implementing promotions. Digital marketing is the use of internet access, the use of social media and other digital devices. Digital marketing helps businesses or businesses promote and market their products and services and can extend communication to new markets that were previously closed or restricted due to time, distance, and method constraints. Gao et al., (2023) argue that digital marketing positively and significantly influences increasing MSME sales.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a shift in the ways consumer's shop. Usually, even though selling online, many consumers still go directly to stores or malls to buy products. But now consumers cannot leave the house because of government regulations and prohibitions. MMs must also organize and manage the sales of their products and services. Product quality needs to be improved and services tailored to appeal to consumers where the definition of product quality is the ability of a product to demonstrate its usefulness, including overall durability, product reliability, accuracy, reliability, ease of use and repair, and other product attributes (Jun-Ho & Jeon, 2022).

According to Musasa & Tlapana (2023), Service quality is the level of excellence expected and the level of excellence in control to meet customer needs or the level of service provided to meet customer expectations. Research conducted by Kim & Kim (2023) and Dhasan & Aryupong (2019) demonstrates that product

quality and service quality have a significant influence on consumer purchases and increase customer satisfaction to subsequently retain customer members.

The decline in sales and consumer confidence also affects MSME operations, so business players need to build trust and good relationships with consumers or do relationship marketing. Relational marketing is a business orientation that focuses on maintaining good relationships with existing customers and building close and mutually beneficial relationships between business entities and consumers by making repeated transactions to retain consumers (Jun-Ho & Jeon, 2022). Results obtained in the study Hardilawati, Sandri and Binangkit (2019) of customer relationship marketing are influential but not significant in improving marketing performance. This happens because there is still a lack of understanding or lack of maximum in the application of customer relationship marketing by MSMEs. Maximum relational marketing is expected to help MSMEs survive and thrive in order to continue to compete in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This study was conducted to further analyze the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on MSMEs, especially in the culinary sector of Palembang City, and to describe survival strategies that MSME members can try in a business environment, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.0 Methods

This research uses the descriptive qualitative method. Descriptive research methods only describe the authenticity of a variable and are not used to test a particular hypothesis. The purpose of descriptive research is to determine the important traits, characteristics, and profiles of people, groups, communities, or other phenomena that are the subject of analysis (Wasik & Handriana, 2023).

This study aims to analyze, explain, and explain the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on MSMEs in the culinary sector in Palembang City and how to overcome it. This research uses a descriptive approach or is a type of qualitative research. The method used in qualitative descriptive analysis is to analyze, describe, and summarize various conditions, and situations from various data collected from the interview process or direct observation of the field related to the problem to be researched.

The source of data in this study is respondents who have culinary businesses in Palembang. Interviews with the respondents were conducted during the month of November 2021. The respondents selected are those who have culinary businesses, granted permission to be interviewed and are included in the MSME category. Research data was taken from respondents by means of direct interviews with each respondent to get information about the impact of COVID-19 on their business sustainability and what strategies they have done to overcome these impacts. The strategies referred to in this study are e-commerce, digital marketing, and customer relationship marketing.

The interview results for each respondent were recorded and then transcribed. The transcript was analyzed by finding phrases related to what impact COVID-19 had on business continuity and what strategies they had done to get out of the impact of COVID-19. Researchers directed strategy disclosure to whether they implemented e-commerce, digital marketing and customer relationship marketing.

3.0 Results and Discussion

This research succeeded in obtaining data from 7 respondents who had businesses in various types of culinary in Palembang City. The following table shows respondent data:

Table 1: Respondents Data

No	Gender	Business Name/Type
1	Female	MamoFiz, special Cookies, Cake and Food
2	Female	Ava Catering
3	Female	Cherly Kitchen: donat, bolen, roti goreng
4	Male	Recofee
5	Female	Rani Kopi
6	Female	Rumah Donuts
7	Male	Pempek WJ Palembang

The impact of COVID-19 on culinary businesses owned by respondents is presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Impact of COVID-19

Respondent Number	Impact
1	The impact of the pandemic was deeply felt by respondent 1, feeling shocked and worried because his business had dropped dramatically. One of the most visible impacts of sales is that the profits obtained from sales decrease.
2	According to respondent 2, the impact experienced was that revenue turnover decreased by around 20%. Another impact felt is that ingredients have increased significantly.
3	The impact experienced by respondent 3 was quite significant, there was a decrease in sales turnover, initially from the sales turnover respondent 3 was able to sell 60 boxes of bolen in a day, but when the pandemic came, respondent 3 was only able to sell 20 boxes a day, as well as donuts, before the pandemic was able to sell 20 dozen in a day, while when the pandemic occurred it was only able to sell 10 dozen a day.
4	The impact of sales is not very visible because respondent 4's business took advantage of the pandemic situation to sell its products.
5	The impact felt by respondent 5 as an MSME business player is a decrease in sales revenue.
6	The impact felt was not much different from some respondents, and what was felt most by respondent 6 was the reduction in the number of customers because buyers were afraid that the virus would spread if they bought food from outside.
7	The impact felt by respondent 7 was that he could not continue his business by opening a shop rented by him because he could not pay the rent.

Table 2 above shows that COVID-19 has an impact on decreasing sales revenue to almost all respondents. Only respondent 4 stated that COVID-19 did not have an impact on declining sales. Respondent 4 also stated that he was actually able to take advantage of the COVID-19 condition to maintain his business and was able to maintain sales turnover. Respondent 2 stated that COVID-19 only had an impact on decreasing revenue by 20%, but he also stated that it was affected by the increase in prices of materials needed in the production process. Respondents 1, 3, 5, 6, and 7 stated that their business experienced a significant decline

in sales, for example, respondent 3 sales decreased from 60 boxes to only 20 boxes a day for bolen cakes, and doughnut sales from 20 dozen to only 10 dozen a day. The worst impact was experienced by respondent 7, who was forced to close his empek-empek shop because he could not pay rent and then moved to only sell at home.

COVID-19 is a global pandemic that has had a devastating impact on people and society. After spreading from China, the pandemic quickly spread to 210 countries, including Indonesia. The COVID-19 pandemic is a major shock to the global economy, including Indonesia. The economy shrank for at least the first half of the year and possibly longer if measures to contain COVID-19 do not work (Pan & Yue, 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused disruptions to national and global supply chains, volatility in financial markets, shocks to consumer demand and negative impacts in key sectors such as food and beverages. It is undeniable that the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak will be felt in the food and beverage industry. Small and medium-sized businesses are expected to be severely affected.

Based on observations or interviews that have been conducted by researchers, the average MSME in the culinary sector of Palembang City experienced a decrease in sales turnover during the COVID-19 disaster. This can happen due to the Implementation of Community Activity Restrictions (PPKM) and also public trust that has dropped due to the COVID-19 disaster on products outside, especially in the culinary sector. Another finding from observations made by researchers is that some MSMEs in the culinary sector are still stable and have not experienced a significant decrease in turnover during the COVID-19 pandemic.

MSMEs are not significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic because they have succeeded in making adjustments or product adaptations quickly and in marketing strategies to survive. Several adjustments can be made by MSMEs to be able to continue to survive, including choosing to open new product lines or update their marketing systems and strategies, because running a business requires players to continue to be responsive to changes in their environment to continue to survive

The strategy of respondents utilise in dealing with COVID-19 is presented in the following table:

Table 3 Strategies to deal with COVID-19

Respondent Number	Strategies applied		
	E-commerce	Digital Marketing	Customer Relationship Marketing
1	Not through e-commerce, because it is not tech-savvy; Instagram and WA only via direct message	Instagram, and WA	Discounts
2	Using Instagram for product marketing from AVA catering, and WhatsApp for communication and sales transactions	Instagram and WA	Discounts and innovations of the latest products. Existing customers do not need to pay DP.
3	No, we focus on selling directly to the field, not through online platforms.	Instagram and WA	Receive criticism and suggestions from customers

4	Only WA, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook status and broadcast features	Broadcast WA, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook	The concept used for this sale is environmentally friendly
5	Utilize Grab and Gojek	Instagram and broadcast whatsapp	Receive criticism and suggestions from customers, pay attention to quality despite product inventory adjustments during the pandemic.
6	Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp	Instagram. Facebook, and Whatsapp	home delivery service
7	Gojek and Grab .	Instagram. Facebook, and Whatsapp	"Orders from neighbors around and customers who are used to buying at me, I send them using Go-Send so they just WA I don't need to come to the house"

Table 3 above, it shows that only respondents 5 and 7 really took advantage of *e-commerce* to get out of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, even though they only used their platforms Gojek and Grab. Other respondents also used *e-commerce* but were only limited to the use of social media such as WA, Facebook and Instagram. Only respondent 3 stated that he did not use social media at all and remained only focused on direct sales to the field. Digital marketing and customer *relationship marketing* strategies are implemented by all respondents as a strategy to maintain market share and customer loyalty. All respondents stated that they used WA, Facebook and Instagram social media as marketing tools. Consumer loyalty is maintained by giving discounts (respondents 1 and 2), receiving criticism from customers (respondents 3 and 5), and not having to pay advances for old customers (respondent 2). Respondent 4 stated that using environmentally friendly concepts, Respondent 6 provided *home delivery services*, and Respondent 7 served purchases through WA and then delivery using Gojek or Grab.

The decrease in turnover experienced by MSMEs in the culinary sector in Palembang City caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and also the decline in the number of consumers makes MSME players have to think more creatively and innovatively. Internet use has become mandatory during the COVID-19 pandemic because all activities are carried out online. In addition to utilizing *e-commerce*, MSME players must be able to take advantage of Internet media to market their products by doing *digital marketing*. Today's highly developed digital era is impossible to avoid. Marketing expert Yuswohadi (2020) said that if they want to survive, MSME players must be able to take advantage of and maximize digital development. Maintaining consumer loyalty is the key to surviving during a pandemic and *customer relationship marketing* can be a strategy to maintain consumer loyalty.

E-commerce is the process of buying and selling a product carried out electronically by sellers and buyers/consumers using computers as transaction intermediaries. At first, *e-commerce* was a retail sales mechanism carried out online, but now it has a broader meaning. *E-commerce* has created a new market in the form of a digital market with more transparent prices, easy access, and a market that has efficient trade fields (Gao et al., 2023). Although not perfect, *e-commerce* has a direct impact on business relationships with suppliers, customers, and competitors and can do product marketing easily. There are several *e-commerce* that can be used by MSME players, especially in Palembang such as Shopee, Tokopedia, Buka Lapak, Go-Jek, Grab and many others.

Based on the results of interviews conducted by researchers, most MSME business players in the culinary sector in Palembang City have used e-commerce as a medium to sell their products. The use of e-commerce by MSME players is certainly to be able to reach a wider market share than just selling offline and only selling in certain areas. E-commerce can also help MSME players reach new consumers effectively and efficiently. Not only as a medium of selling, but e-commerce can also be used to build relationships, create new market concepts and utilize a more effective and efficient market system and can also be used as a learning medium. MSME players can conduct sales research conducted by competitors and adopt and *upgrade* them.

Digital marketing is a promotional activity and also a market search using *digital* media online by utilizing social media as a means. Various ways can be used to do digital marketing by MSME players, namely, using social media such as creating content about products and then sending it to *Instagram, Facebook, Twitter* and other social media. Technology in today's increasingly advanced era must be utilized by MSME players and *digital marketing* must be understood and learned by MSME players (Kurniawati et al., 2021).

Based on observations or interviews conducted by researchers, MSME business players have used Digital Marketing to promote their businesses, as was done by Mr Abi who has a coffee specialist business that he named "Recoffee". He markets his products by utilizing WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter and Facebook status and broadcast.

The same is the case with Mrs Ayu Lestari, the owner of the "Ava Catering" business who uses social media, namely Instagram to promote her sales, because according to her, Instagram is the right place to promote her catering products during the pandemic and hopes that many people will visit the catering profile and consumers are interested in ordering. If there are customers who want to order, Ibu Ayu puts in a WhatsApp number that can be contacted to communicate and transact with her customers.

Customer relationship marketing can be one of the strategies of MSMEs to maintain consumer loyalty. MSME players should not only focus on capturing new consumers but must also be able to maintain the quality of products and services, maintain existing consumers, create consumer satisfaction and ultimately create consumer loyalty. Loyal consumers are most likely not to move to other products because they already have trust in our products (Rahman et al., 2018). *Customer relationship* marketing is a strategic concept to do marketing by establishing long-term relationships with consumers, namely maintaining mutually beneficial relationships between business players and consumers that will create transactions and form consumer loyalty.

Based on the results of observations and interviews with several MSME business players, it can be stated that overall business players continue to prioritize customers and continue to provide the best service for customers so that customers continue to trust the MSME business products purchased. One of the tricks in doing CRM in a situation like today, MSME players are advised to be able to provide care for consumers who are experiencing difficulties due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The concern shown by MSME players also aims to market products. One example is providing discounts and free product schemes to couriers delivering food and setting aside a portion of income for needy people. This method aims to make consumers trust and create *customer bonding*. In this COVID-19 pandemic, MSME players not only think about themselves but also show concern and positive things to establish relationships with consumers.

4.0 Conclusion

The respondent in this study is a culinary MSME player in the city of Palembang. The results of this study show that the COVID-19 pandemic situation has an impact on decreasing sales for almost all respondents. Only one respondent stated that his sales were not affected by COVID-19. Strategies applied by respondents to escape the impact of the pandemic include *e-commerce*, *digital marketing*, and *customer relationship marketing*. This research shows that only a small percentage of respondents utilize *e-commerce* media in the form of Gojek and Grab. Most respondents only utilize social media such as WA, Facebook, and Instagram to transact with customers. Digital marketing strategies and *customer relationship marketing* are strategies carried out by all respondents to get out of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Even though the economy is currently on ups and downs, there is great hope for MSME business players in the culinary sector. This research advises the Palembang City government to improve, and coordinate business players to develop even more and hold socialization about the importance of utilizing digital media during the pandemic so that they can use technology to make sales more easily. For the people of Palembang City, especially MSME business players in the culinary sector, they might adapt and compromise with the pandemic to survive. They also should cooperate to form an online community. Sharing tips and tricks for their businesses can successfully increase consumer loyalty during the pandemic. Finally, they can maintain small to large things to continue the growth of their MSME businesses.

This research is only limited to qualitative descriptions of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on culinary MSMEs in Palembang City, and the strategies they are doing to get out of these impacts. The study did not design what strategy they were supposed to use. Future research is recommended to also analyze and design what strategies are right for culinary MSMEs in Palembang City to be able to maintain their business even in the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Tarikh : 20 Januari 2023

Prof. Madya Dr. Nur Hisham Ibrahim
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Kelulusan daripada pihak tuan dalam perkara ini amat dihargai.

Sekian, terima kasih.

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Saya yang menjalankan amanah,

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