

The role of social media marketing during the Covid-19 pandemic

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Abstract: *This study aims to determine the role of social media marketing during the COVID-19 pandemic in the culinary industry in Kupang City by observing social media marketing behavior on Facebook Group Bekin Lapar. The method that is used in this study is to observe on Facebook Group: Group Bekin Lapar then conducted data triangulation from observation, documentation, and interview and made the conclusions about the role of social media marketing during the COVID-19 pandemic in the culinary industry in Kupang City. The study concluded that the role of social media marketing in Facebook Group: Group Bekin Lapar is significant to promote, sell, recommend the products of group members, and find information about culinary products in Kupang City during the COVID-19 pandemic. Recommendation to other culinary businesses in other cities is to optimize the role of social media marketing to promote and sell their product during the COVID-19 pandemic.*

Keywords: *culinary industries; Facebook group; social media marketing*

Abstrak: *Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui peran social media marketing pada masa pandemi COVID-19 di industri kuliner di Kota Kupang dengan mengamati perilaku social media marketing pada Facebook Group Bekin Lapar. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah dengan mengamati di Grup Facebook: Grup Bekin Lapar, kemudian melakukan triangulasi data dari observasi, dokumentasi, dan wawancara, serta membuat simpulan tentang peran social media marketing selama pandemi COVID-19 dalam industri kuliner di Kota Kupang. Penelitian menyimpulkan bahwa peran social media marketing di Grup Facebook: Grup Bekin Lapar signifikan untuk mempromosikan, menjual, merekomendasikan produk anggota grup, dan mencari informasi tentang produk kuliner di Kota Kupang selama pandemi COVID-19. Rekomendasi kepada pelaku bisnis kuliner lain di kota lain adalah mengoptimalkan peran social media marketing untuk mempromosikan dan menjual produknya di masa pandemi COVID-19.*

Kata kunci: *grup Facebook; industri kuliner; social media marketing*

1 INTRODUCTION

The increasing number of positive cases of COVID-19 in Indonesian territory encourages the Indonesian government and local governments to restrict interactions between individuals. This policy has an effect on economic and trade activities which in the transaction requires intense interaction between sellers and buyers. This resulted in the decrease of some economic activities and even the closure of some

businesses that desperately require the arrival of customers (Bisnis.com, 2021). At first, the effect of COVID-19 was also experienced by the culinary industry. Restrictions on customer visits that were half of the capacity of restaurants caused a decrease in the number of consumers visiting culinary places such as cafes, restaurants, stalls, and even street vendors. However, the industry was able to survive because the products offered are a daily primary need. In addition, businessmen optimized their marketing activities by using internet technology which is known as social media marketing. The COVID-19 pandemic increased consumers' social media marketing behaviors concerning identifying products, collecting product information, shopping, and purchasing products (Mason, 2020).

Social media marketing is the use of social media channels to promote the company and its products. Social media marketing is qualified as a form of word-of-mouth marketing. Social media websites allow individuals to interact with other individuals and build relationships. In the digital marketing era, many internet users are more creative in utilizing popular media such as WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook (Nyoko & Samuel, 2021). Social networks such as Twitter, Facebook, and others allow their users to post, comment, repost, share, and word of mouth. With millions of Facebook and Twitter users, social media can provide businesses with a digital medium for segmented consumer communications (Mason et al., 2021). As internet technology evolves and is supported by the ease of using smartphones, businessmen easily promote their products on social media. Evidence indicates that the use of social media has increased significantly (Tam & Kim, 2018). From the supply side, marketers were easier to promote their products, while from the demand side, consumers were also easier to get information about a particular product. This activity was carried out without any direct physical interaction. Communication could be done on social media or continued through other communication media such as mobile phones or Whatsapp applications. On social media, consumers were able to share their experiences about the services provided by a product/ brand/ company and influenced other potential customers. While marketers could also read comments or reviews, so that they were able to implement the appropriate marketing strategies (Vinerean, 2017).

Social media marketing involves using online social media, such as Facebook, to reach consumers in innovative ways (Karimi & Naghibi, 2015). Research conducted by Febriyanti et al. (2017) showed that SMEs also use Facebook as social media to market their products to the public and build communities by utilizing Facebook groups. Social networking is no longer just a friendship page, but it has become a new wave of economics. Several smart companies use it as a marketing medium and as a support for business activities (Suryani, 2014). Alalwan et al. (2017) found that social media platforms have a more intense impact and have a word-of-mouth effect compared to traditional marketing. Social media is one of the powerful ways to promote goods and services through social media marketing (Untari & Fajariana, 2018).

Facebook is one of the most popular social media today. Quoted from Digital Report 2021, until January 2021, Facebook ranked 4th the most popular social media in Indonesia in 2020-2021 (Dahono, 2021). This encourages businessmen to market their products on Facebook. Many Facebook members use Facebook as a medium of marketing and create opportunities for marketers (Cahyono, 2013). On social media platforms such as Facebook, the design of the social sharing mechanism intended to encourage consumers to share viral messages is crucial (Schulze et al., 2015).

Facebook is not only used by people in big cities in Indonesia, such as Jakarta or Surabaya, but has penetrated other cities throughout Indonesia, such as Kupang City. Kupang City, the capital of East Nusa Tenggara Province, is one of the cities affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. This encouraged the culinary businessmen in Kupang City who tried to get around social restrictions by optimizing the role of social media marketing of their products on Facebook. One of the culinary groups that are well known by Facebook users in Kupang City is Group Bekin Lapar (GBL). This group was created before the COVID-19 pandemic in June 2019 and has a large number of followers. During the pandemic, the users are more active in the use of this group as a promotional media and looking for information about culinary in Kupang City.

The problem of this study is how is the behavior and role of social media marketing conducted by Kupang City culinary businessmen in Facebook Group: Group Bekin Lapar during the COVID-19 pandemic? The purpose of this study is to find out more details about the role of social media marketing during the COVID-19 pandemic in the culinary industry in Kupang City by making observations on social media marketing behavior in Facebook Group: Group Bekin Lapar. The scope of the research is limited to investigating the increasing promotion activity and searching product activity on social media,

particularly in Facebook Group: Group Bekin Lapar, by comparing the number of posts by the marketer and the consumers before and during COVID-19. The observation was validated by interviewing the marketer, recommender, and consumers. This research is useful for businessmen, especially in the culinary field to be able to utilize and optimize the promotion through social media during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2 METHOD

This type of research is qualitative research. The population in this study were all members of Facebook Group: Group Bekin Lapar, who posted in the period of June 2019 to February 2021. The method used in this study is to observe the posting activities of members of the Facebook Group: Group Bekin Lapar, which is the activities and behaviors of members of the Facebook group who act like marketers in promoting products related to culinary, consumer behavior in seeking information about culinary, and behaviors of marketers or consumers who recommend culinary products. The studied variables were the total number of posts, the number of posts by culinary category, the number of posts based on the type of business, business scope, and comparison between the number of posts before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The basis of decision-making is by comparing the number of posts before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. If the number of posts and activities is higher during the pandemic, it can be said that the role of social media marketing increases. The next stage is conducting data triangulation from observation, documentation, and interviewing, and making conclusions about the role of social media marketing during the COVID-19 pandemic in the culinary industry in Kupang City. The interview will be applied to the marketers, consumers, and recommenders who post on the Facebook Group: Group Bekin Lapar. They will be questioned about why they used this social media to promote and seek the product, how they optimized the role of this culinary group, and the different behavior before and during COVID-19 in promoting, searching, and recommending the product. This study used convenience sampling that collects the information from members of the population who are conveniently available to provide it. Convenience sampling is cheap and easy to conduct, but there is no way of telling how representative the research results are. It is often used to obtain some quick information (Bougie & Sekaran, 2019). A total of 33 respondents consists of 20 marketers, 3 consumers, and 10 recommenders who were interviewed via Messenger. This number is based on the proportion of each sample category.

3 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Facebook Group: Group Bekin Lapar is a group created on social media Facebook to inform the searchers and culinary providers domiciled in Kupang City regarding the post about the selling of food, beverages, snacks, and other types of culinary. This group was created on June 11, 2019, and on March 7, 2021, already had 14.144 members. This group is managed by 4 admins and 5 moderators. From the observations on the Facebook Group: Group Bekin Lapar's web, since the group was founded in June 2019 until February 2021 (21 months), 286 group members had made 709 posts consisting of 685 accounts promoting their products or as sellers, 5 accounts as product information seekers or prospective buyers, and 19 accounts as recommenders. A recommender is an account that does not sell or buy products but promotes or references someone else's products. It was word-of-mouth behavior on this social media.

In the posting of selling products, not all products have a brand or trademark. More than half of the total posts were 379 posts that did not use the brand in selling their products, while another 306 posts used trademarks to make it easier for consumers to recognize and search for their products. At the documentation stage, it can be classified into several sets of data. The types or categories of products promoted in the Group Bekin Lapar from June 2019 through February 2021 can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of posts during June 2019-February 2021 by categories or type of product

Categories/ Type of product	Number of posts
Indonesian food	272
Snacks	204
Fruits/ vegetables/ seeds/ tubers/ eggs	82
Beverages	58
Dessert	31
International foods	31
Meat/ fish/ raw material	18
Local traditional food	12
Ingredients for cakes/ snacks/ pizza	1
	709

Source: Observation at Group Bekin Lapar (2021)

From this table, the category of Indonesian food dominates the most in this group. Indonesian foods include grilled rice, yellow rice, grilled chicken, pork rice, seasoning chicken, chicken noodles, meatballs, fried pork, smashed chicken, duck rice, chicken satay, rendang, grilled duck, sambal, and others. Some offer only one type of food and others offer several types of food. Another category that is often offered is snacks. Snacks are various types of cakes and bread, chips, fried foods, spring rolls, tape, egg nuts, and various other traditional snacks. In addition, the seller also offers several types of fruits, vegetables, grains, tubers, and eggs. Beverages ranked fourth as the most frequently posted in the product category. Coffee, chocolate drinks, fruit juice, boba, smoothies, blended ice, Thai tea, green banana ice, and even health drinks are some of the drinks offered. Desserts such as pudding, jelly, cream, and salad are also offered in this group. In addition to Indonesian food, there are also international foods such as pizza and Korean cuisine as well as local traditional dishes such as sei, bose, and sour fish soup.

Based on the type of business that can be seen in Fig.1, the most promoted product is home business with as many as 431 posts. A home business is a business that does not have a special place to sell its products. The consumer's request or order was generally done at home and consumers take their products or delivered them using courier services. Other types of businesses promoted are depot (food stalls) and restaurants. There are 50 posts that offer commodities such as various vegetables, onions, potatoes, carrots, chilies, corn, meat, fish, and eggs. Bakery, cafés, and even businesses like pizza hut and KFC also promote their products here. Similarly, supermarkets such as Transmart Carrefour Kupang also used Facebook Group Bekin Lapar to inform their products.

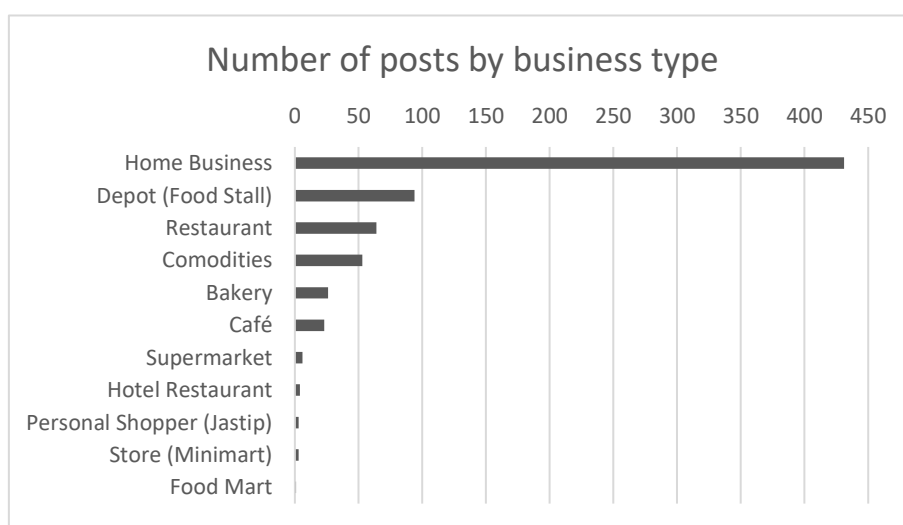


Fig. 1. Number of posts by business type

Source: Observation at Group Bekin Lapar (2021)

There is a unique and interesting thing during the pandemic: there was a hotel that optimized its restaurants by promoting a variety of food and beverages. Aston Kupang Hotel several times posted about selling food and drinks in its restaurant. Then, there is the posting about personal shoppers (Jastip/ Jasa Titipan) which is a service provider that offers a cake delivery service that has a brand from Surabaya City such as brownies, spiku, and others. Stores, mini markets, and food marts also utilize this group to introduce their businesses and products.

Viewed from the scope of business, posts are dominated by businesses on a local scale, meaning the scope of business is only in Kupang City and surrounding areas which is as much as 94% of the total posts. As many as 4% of posts are national scale businesses or have a national brand such as Excelso, Brownies Amanda, Sang Pisang, J.Co Donuts, and Bon Café. While an international scale such as Pizza Hut, Aston Kupang Hotel, KFC, and Transmart Carrefour posted as many as 17 times or only 2% of the total number of posts in Group Bekin Lapar. The number of posts by the scope of business is shown in Fig. 2.



Fig. 2. Number of posts by the scope of business
Source: Observation at Group Bekin Lapar (2021)

To be able to compare the number of posts before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, please look at Fig. 3 and Fig. 4. From those graphs, before the pandemic, Facebook members of the Group Bekin Lapar had started to post actively in this group to promote their products or seek information about products. Since the group was formed in June 2019, the number of posts has increased, although, in the end, it became a downward trend from November 2019 to March 2020.

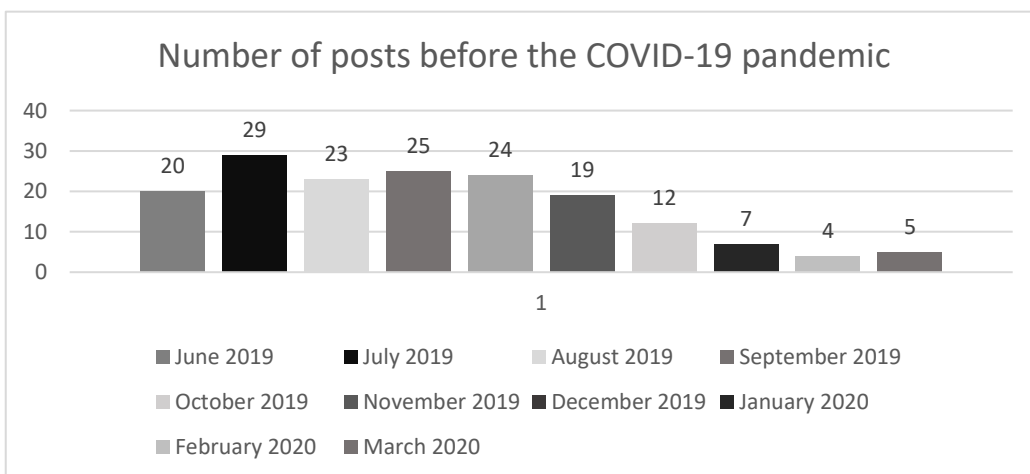


Fig 3. Number of posts before the COVID-19 pandemic
Source: Observation at Group Bekin Lapar (2021)

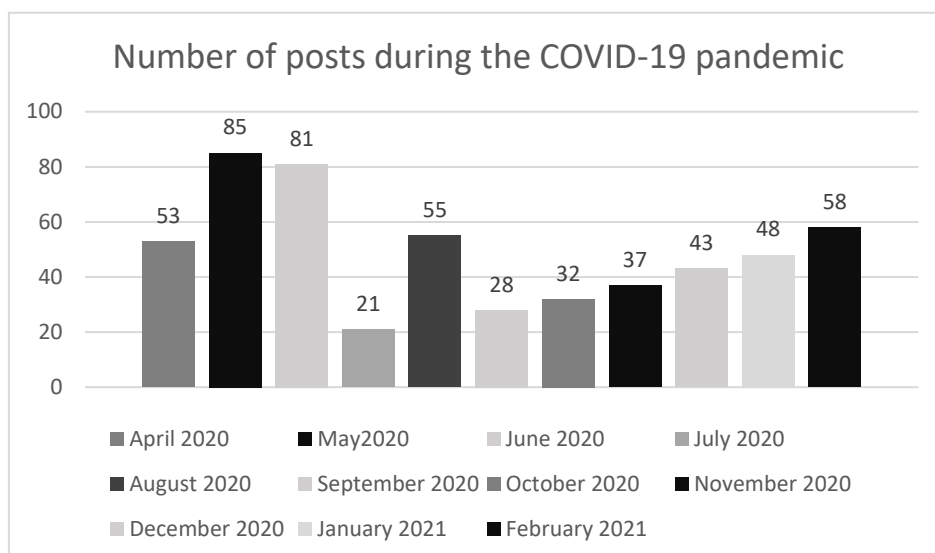


Fig 4. Number of posts during the COVID-19 pandemic
Source: Observation at Group Bekin Lapar (2021)

With the increasing number of COVID-19 positive cases and restrictions imposed by the government, members of this group are increasingly active in posting their products. During the pandemic, some entertainment venues, stalls, restaurants, shops, and malls, imposed restrictions on operating hours, even only allowing online delivery orders. This is the factor that causes marketers and sellers to maximize the role of social media to market their products. The number of posts increased significantly from April 2020 to June 2020. Although it had decreased in July 2020, the number of posts from September 2020 to February 2021 moved to an increasing trend. Compared to the average number of posts per month before the pandemic, the average number of posts to utilize social media in the Facebook Group Bekin Lapar as a promotional media for products, product recommendations, and culinary industry information in Kupang during the pandemic had increased almost three times.

Interviewing some members of this group who act as sellers, consumers, and recommenders, the reason for posting the promotion of their product on Facebook Group due to restricted social contact. Christiani, the coffee shop owner, closed her café and promote her product in this Facebook group. She explained” *I started to promote in social media because of government regulation about COVID-19 social distancing. So, I only served online orders...*”

“Food is the daily needs, during pandemic customer tend to use social media to searching food information, for that reason, I provide that and promoted in GBL Facebook culinary group.....” (Jimy-Resto owner).

As increasing the number of group members, other sellers were inspired to expedite their sold products. Perishable goods are the reason from sellers promote their goods on Facebook. *“... fruit are perishable goods, so I just post the picture in the social media groups, the consumer responded it immediately...”* (Piter-fruit seller). Yeyen, the vegetable merchant said.... *“I don’t have to harvest, I am waiting for the orders and delivering them, so I minimize the rotten goods...”*

Table 1 shows that Indonesian food had 272 posted and fruit and vegetable sellers had 82 posted of promoting their goods.

On the demand side, the customers looking for their needed goods. They used this platform to find a product without any physical contact with the sellers. Lenny (group member) testified that *“..... we don’t have to go to the store. Just see the seller promotion on Facebook and order it....”*. David (group member) also gave his opinion *“...all kinds of food were offered in this group, we can order a variety of food, snacks even ingredients....”*

Some members recommended the sold product in this group. *“... I just share the promotion product, because my friend is the owner of that business”* (Bobby-group member). Another reason is customer satisfaction with the product and services. Made (group member) shared his experiences *“...the food is delicious, fast delivery and open 24 hours...”*

Both customers and sellers are intent to optimize the role of this culinary group. They frequently posted to gain more customers. Alexander, a traditional food seller, explained his reason... “*it is free to promote on Facebook.... Every day I promote my food here...I’ve got more and more orders...*”. Jeane the product seeker said, “*almost all culinary product in Kupang City has been posted in GBL, if you need information about a certain culinary product, just comment... they (other members) will respond to you....*”.

Many people work from home, they were not able to come to the restaurant, but they were able to order the food that was offered in this Facebook Group. The frequency of promotion has been increasing since the pandemic COVID-19. It can be seen in the comparison between Fig. 3 and Fig. 4. Linda (snack seller) confirmed that she intensified the number of posts during COVID-19 “*...since we have to close the stall earlier, the number of customers went down. Thus, I used the Facebook group to promote intensively*”. Royke said, “*I am not a seller... On pandemic, I worked from home and not going anywhere...to order food, I found in this group and another application*”. Another opinion, “*comparing to before COVID-19 outbreak, now I am more utilize frequently this group to find the product that I need*” (Ririn-group member).

Thus, it can be concluded that the role of social media marketing in the Facebook Group: Group Bekin Lapar were utilized by the member of the group as promotion media to sell their product and as a source of information to find culinary food in Kupang City during the COVID-19 pandemic.

4 CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

During the COVID-19 pandemic, members of Facebook Group Bekin Lapar increased their social media marketing activities, whether promoting or selling, recommending, or seeking information about culinary products in Kupang City. This can be seen from the number of posts every month during the COVID-19 pandemic, which increased up to three times compared to before the pandemic. The categories that are often posted are Indonesian food and snacks, while the dominating types of businesses are home businesses and businesses on a local scale. This data was also confirmed by the members of the group by interview. They have increased the number of promotions since the pandemic COVID-19 outbreak.

From the results of research, it can be concluded that the role of social media marketing in Facebook Group: Group Bekin Lapar were utilized by the member of the group as promotion media to sell their product and as a source of information to find culinary food in Kupang City during the COVID-19 pandemic. The limitation of this research is discussed only for the member of the Facebook Group in a certain period and may not apply to general behavior outside this group member. Recommendation to other researchers to investigate the customer behavior in applying social media marketing in all social media applications (platform) to obtain a generalization conclusion and involving the opinion of social media experts and policymakers.

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