



Proposed Marketing Strategy for Business-to-Business (Case Study: Kijang)

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Abstract. In 2020 the clothing industry experienced a contraction due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which reduced people's purchasing power and economic activity. The pandemic has caused a shift in business transactions from offline to online, impacting consumers and business players. As a clothing producer, Kijang needs help marketing its products. The pandemic is challenging for B2B firms to adapt to the new situation. New strategies need to be formed coupled with more complex consumer behavior. Consumer analysis was conducted by conducting interviews with several wholesalers regarding the needs and wants in finding suppliers in the digital era to become the basis for designing new marketing strategies. The results showed that respondents still prioritized direct supplier searches. However, they have started looking for online suppliers as an alternative. The researcher summarizes the needs of respondents as follows having access to check product materials directly through online purchases, obtaining price information for comparison purposes, guarantees to receive good products, obtaining information about products to be sent, and general supplier information.

Keywords: Marketing strategy, business-to-business, clothing producer, wholesaler, consumer behavior.

INTRODUCTION

The textile and clothing industry has performed well, with continued growth from 2017 until 2019. However, in 2020, this industry contracted by 8.88% because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2020 growth contraction was also the most significant contraction since 2011. The pandemic decreased people's purchasing power and economic activity due to mobility limitations (Kementrian Perindustrian Indonesia, 2021). Most small business entrepreneurs, such as home industries and groups of MSMEs, including clothing manufacturers, experienced a decline in demand during COVID-19 (Rahmanda & Aslami, 2022). Consumers allocate their money to primary needs and health during pandemics since they tend to undertake activities at home instead of buying clothes (Isnaini, 2021).

The pandemic condition causes changes in behavior in the community to do business transactions online. The shift in consumer preferences toward more digital activities has impacted consumers and business players. According to the Indonesian E-commerce Association (IDEA) (2021, as cited in Sukarno, 2021), the number of MSMEs joining various marketplaces has reached 4.8 million by March 2021. That number increased from an estimated 3.8 million until the end of 2020. MSMEs that have joined the digital ecosystem by utilizing the marketplace in Indonesia can survive the COVID-19 situation (Rosita, 2020).

As a clothing producer, the growth pattern of the textile and clothing industry from 2017 to 2020 is also reflected in Kijang's historical sales data. In 2017-2019, Kijang sales increased, supported by adding new customers every year, but in 2020 sales fell by 86.75%. The decrease in revenue was caused by a decrease in demand from Kijang's primary customers. The majority of wholesalers as main customers could not operate during the pandemic. These conditions cause a decrease in sales and no new customers like last year.

Kijang is a children's professional costume producer who began operations in 1990 under the Kijang brand. Kijang has 42 models of professional costumes, including police, doctor, and many more for boys and girls aged 2-12 years. Kijang's primary customers are merchant wholesalers in various Indonesian provinces in Java and Sumatra that sell to a retailer. Kijang has used direct marketing to sell its products from its beginnings. Kijang conducts product presentations to wholesalers with a personal approach. Kijang will leave some products for market testing if both sides agree. Furthermore, wholesalers place orders directly with the owner when products are required.

Surviving direct marketing as it has from the start is difficult with limited conditions. Seeing changes in consumer behavior online, Kijang attempted to sell on online marketplaces. This activity makes Kijang compete with online retailers. However, this action was unsuccessful. As a business actor trying to survive in times of crisis, Kijang tried several new marketing activity innovations, including creating a company website and social media account on Instagram and Facebook Page in mid-2021. The website is needed and appropriately used to overcome the problem of physical distancing (Maharani et al., 2021). From various digital marketing tools, search engines are crucial in influencing customer purchase decisions in the digital era (Nursatyo & Rosliani, 2018). The company's website can appear when internet users search for related needs on search engines. That can make Kijang's website reach the target market, and they can learn more about Kijang through other internet channels.

Marketing strategy through digital media is an effective and efficient step because the chain of marketing channels will become shorter (Sulistiyani et al., 2020). Kijang tries to display the information the target customer needs to build consumer trusts, such as information on the product variants with clear images, company profiles, and contact numbers connected to the WhatsApp business. The action was taken to minimize sales weaknesses on the internet, such as unclear brands; items sent that do not match the picture and description, and numerous frauds (Sudaryono et al., 2020).

Kijang can attract new customers and gain sales, even though the number of visitors still needs to be higher. Nonetheless, only some buyers purchase in big amounts as wholesaler customers did. Most buyers buy small quantities with random product variations (not following bulk packaging standards). From the observations made by the owner, only a few wholesalers buy directly through the website. Even if there are, they only order in small quantities. Also, the number of followers on Kijang's social media still needs to grow. From the owner's observation, competitors with the same business model have yet to apply digital marketing. Nonetheless, this situation can also be an opportunity if it fits the target market's needs. In this digital era, it is becoming increasingly crucial for B2B firms to improve their competitive position in the market (Koch & Windsperger, 2017).

Kijang still feels that the current digital marketing activities could be more optimal. B2B marketing messages usually have informative content to tell consumers something to educate rather than sell. In some cases, B2B sales may occur later in a year or more (Rėklaitis & Pilelienė, 2019). E.A. Kemp et al. (2018) said that decision-maker emotions at B2B firms play a role in purchasing decisions. Povolná (2017) suggests that B2B can deliver creative and engaging messages to maintain stronger relationships and attract attention.

Kijang also needs to know whether its current digital marketing activities are compatible with Kijang's business model for its wholesale customers. For example, some literature explains that only a few B2B firms adopt social media (Lacoste, 2016). Social media is not commonly used in B2B markets to close sales but is more often to manage relationships after contracts (Sara et al., 2021). However, social media is still widely used by some B2B firms as an addition to existing traditional communication practices as a form of two-way communication with customers to influence trust and loyalty effectively and used as a mediator of supplier-to-customer and customer-to-customer communication (Rose et al., 2021). Personal communication is the most important aspect of the B2B market, although it is only sometimes considered ideal in the B2C market (Swani et al., 2020).

Firms need to know customers' digital needs to understand better behavior in choosing suppliers and demand for digital activities. Digital propositions and communications must thoroughly understand customers' characteristics, behaviors, needs, and desires (Chaffey & Chadwick, 2019). In this digital era, firms must provide unique services that integrate modern technologies that customers know and can quickly solve their problems. Firms should consider customer-oriented and technology-oriented innovative behavior (Woo et al., 2021). Customers will only pay attention to the new technologies in the market with interest and cooperation (Hoenkamp et al., 2011).

B2B firms need a customized marketing strategy through the customer experience. With the stages of the decision-making process being quite complex, firms can choose the one that best suits their needs (Veronica et al., 2018). The marketing strategy should meet the demands of the target markets. Creating a strategy in this digital economic era requires information that offers a clear picture of the wants and needs of customers for the desired products and services (Santoso et al., 2020). Business market behavior can be studied from the following four aspects: when customers buy, where customers buy, how to buy, and who buys (Rosenbloom, 2013). The decision-making unit of a purchasing organization in B2B firms, called buying center, consists of five roles, including;

1. Users
Members who will use the product or service.
2. Influencers
Members who identify specifications needs and provide information for alternatives if needed.
3. Buyers
Members with authority to select and negotiate with suppliers.
4. Decision
Members who choose or approve the final appointment.
5. Gatekeepers
Members who control the flow of information.

The buying process for the business market is almost the same as the consumer market. Furthermore, the business market is more complex. Buying decisions in the business market requires more capital, technical considerations, economic conditions, and the interaction of organizations incorporated in its ecosystem resulting in longer, more detailed, and formal purchases. According to Kotler & Keller, the flow of the business buying decision process consists of 8 stages (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). Buyers looking for a supplier for the first time mostly do all these steps. These stages give an overview of the purchasing decision process for a new product. Every business has its own set of requirements. The author describes the eight steps of buying decision process as follows:

1. Problem Recognition
The buying process begins with recognizing a problem or needs that may be met by a product or service impacted by an internal or external influence.
2. General Need Description
Buyers begin to determine the value, characteristics, and quantity they want to get. Buyers start sorting the priority intangible attribute values such as price, location, and quality.
3. Product Specification
This step is carried out in the industrial sector to analyze product components for redesign, standardization, or manufacturing techniques for cost estimates.
4. Supplier Search
Buyers start looking for potential suppliers. Nowadays, buyers can easily search for suppliers with the help of the Internet.
5. Proposal Solicitation
Buyers begin their buying process by negotiating their requirements with the chosen supplier and determining whether the supplier can fulfill their needs. In this phase, it is equally critical for the supplier to grab the opportunity for long-term acquisition.
6. Supplier Selection
When the buyer decides that the selected supplier meets the essential standards, they continue negotiating the price and completing the transaction procedure, such as shipping method, delivery time, and payment method.
7. Order-Routine Specification
If the preceding process goes well, the purchase process is completed with an agreement on payment, delivery, and after-sales service if the products need to be returned.
8. Performance Review
If the buyer is satisfied with the purchase, the supplier can be employed as a permanent supplier for a future transaction.

METHODS

This study aims to identify a suitable marketing strategy for business-to-business organizations in the clothing industry affected by the pandemic and find the appropriate marketing approach based on target market demands in this digital era. In the case of Kijang, the target market is wholesalers in big cities on the island of Java. Researchers conduct market research to identify consumer needs and behavior to meet consumer expectations through the products and services (Arifen et al., 2019). This research approach uses qualitative research methods to analyze the marketing needs of Kijang customers in the digital era.

The qualitative research method is research that explores and understands a social or human problem through open-ended questions framed in the form of a word, built inductively from specific to general, and whose data the researcher interprets meaning in the form of a final report with a flexible structure (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research can provide context and information-rich data to increase the validity of business research (Basyah & Zulfadhli, 2020). Authors undertake consumer research to understand better customer behavior in selecting suppliers and the demand for digital needs. Researchers undertake consumer research to collect information from various groups with similar knowledge, attitudes, and behavior characteristics. Data is collected just once in non-contrived settings called field studies, where events proceed normally with minimum involvement from the researcher (Sekaran & Bougie, 2020).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the author provides a summary and discussion of the results of interviews with respondents regarding the business buyers' behavior, the decision buying process, and behavior towards digital technology. Consumer analysis in this study was conducted by interviewing wholesalers who might be potential customers. Respondents interviewed by the researcher were eight wholesalers who sell children's clothing and children's uniforms in the Java Region as the target market for the Kijang. **TABLE 1** is a list of respondents in this study.

TABLE 1. List of respondents to this research

No	Name	Position	Roles	Wholesale Product Category
1	TM	Owner	Influencer, User, Decider, Gatekeeper, Buyer	School uniforms, babysitter uniforms, training t-shirts.
2	JI	Store Assistant	Influencer & Gatekeeper	Children's traditional clothes and professional costumes
3	BS	Store Assistant	Influencer & Gatekeeper	Professional clothes for children and adults, traditional clothes for children and adults
4	BJ	Store Assistant	Influencer & Gatekeeper	Professional clothes for children and adults
5	SM	Owner	Influencer, User, Decider, Gatekeeper, Buyer	Professional clothes for children and adults
6	WJ	Owner	Influencer, User, Decider, Gatekeeper, Buyer	Professional clothes for children and adults
7	IJ	Owner	Influencer, User, Decider, Gatekeeper, Buyer	School uniforms, school batik, Muslim clothes
8	KJ	Owner	Influencer, User, Decider, Gatekeeper, Buyer	Professional clothes for children and baby clothes

Business Buyer Behavior

For most respondents, the owner plays all roles in all purchasing decisions. Only a few respondents share the role with their store assistants. They decide which products to sell, where to research and select suppliers, communicate with suppliers, make orders, and manage inventories. Respondents who specialize in selling professional costumes always stock the product. Meanwhile, the respondent who offer at seasonal times only restock at certain moments or when there is a request from their customer. Due to the changing market situations caused by the pandemic, some respondents are attempting to make online sales in marketplaces such as JI, BS, BA, and TM. Other respondents decided not to sell online due to their age, experience difficulty preparing for online sales, and lack of internet skills. Most respondents have the same preference in seeking suppliers. They want suppliers that supply good quality products at reasonable prices since they want to satisfy their customers, offer credit terms payment, and can build a connection.

Problem recognition, General Description, and Product Specification

The respondent, specializing in selling professional uniforms, has been selling these products since the beginning. Some respondents sell professional uniforms to add a range of products to attract more customers, such as JI, TM, and IJ. Four out of eight respondents believe that the completeness of accessories for professional uniforms is more appealing to consumers. Some Respondents also assess their customers' purchasing power regarding what their potential buyers are willing to pay, such as BS, SM, and IJ. Respondents who understand quality select suppliers offering suitable materials, such as TM, BJ, and KJ.

Supplier Search, Product Solicitation, and Supplier Selection

All respondents have different experiences in finding suppliers. TM, JI, BJ, WJ, and IJ search for suppliers by gathering the required information. BS and BJ gather market information by word of mouth or ask their colleagues what products are in high demand in the market. SM and BS got supplier information through her mother's reference, who did business first. IJ looks for confection information that produces the product he wants to sell. Six respondents have the experience of being visited by the supplier's salesperson to offer products.

All respondents are looking for suppliers with the preferences they want. If respondents have found a suitable supplier and product for resale, they immediately choose the supplier and place an order. For selecting supplier locations that will become partners in the future, all respondents except KJ are okay with the distance factor if the quality and the price are reasonable. Some respondents also consider the supplier location during the product testing stage since, in their experience, suppliers rarely offer free delivery when buying products in small quantities.

Order Routine Specification and Performance Review

Most respondents contact the supplier with WhatsApp, except KJ, who orders by telephone. They negotiate, order, and complain when something happens to the supplier. Convenience in ordering routines determines cooperation between wholesalers and suppliers in the future. Because orders are usually repeated, they need a supplier who is familiar with their order. Several items are evaluated on the market initially by selling samples from suppliers, or some products are purchased first, depending on the supplier's policy. Respondents want to select suppliers who are a better fit for them based on their preferences.

Abilities, Needs, and Attitude Experience to Use of Digital Technologies

Of the eight respondents, only five (TM, JI, BS, BA, and IJ) were friendly with digital advances. Most respondents contact the supplier with WhatsApp, except KJ, who orders by telephone. They negotiate, order, and complain when something happens to the supplier. WJ and SM also use a smartphone, but only for using WA. The following five respondents have a smartphone, use WhatsApp, have a laptop, and use it often, understand how online marketplaces and internet browsers work, and have social media accounts on Instagram and Facebook. Due to the changing market situations caused by the pandemic, some respondents are attempting to make online sales in marketplaces such as this JI, BS, BA, and TM. Other respondents decided not to sell online due to their age, experience difficulty preparing for online sales, and lack of internet skills.

These five respondents have tried to find suppliers online to find suitable products for resale. Each respondent also has different experiences in finding suppliers on the internet. Some of the activities carried out by respondents in searching for respondents on the internet include searching for suppliers with related keywords on Google with a laptop or browser on a smartphone, looking for the nearest confection address, and looking on social media. The five respondents have yet to find a supplier from the internet as a long-term business partner. Some respondents have not attempted to search for suppliers on the internet again because of previous failures, such as receiving goods of poor quality.

Searching for suppliers on the internet is possible in the digital era, but for these respondents, this is still a new thing because it is still at the trial stage and has not become a daily job routine since the pandemic. Some respondents also find it difficult and uncomfortable. These needs are to have access to inspect product material directly through online purchases, obtain price information for comparison purposes, guarantee to receive a good product, obtain

information about similar products to be shipped, and general supplier information. The **TABLE 2** below summarizes the answers from several respondents.

TABLE 2. Respondent's needs in finding suppliers on the internet

Needs	TM	JI	BS	BJ	IJ
Assess product material directly	√			√	
Price information for comparative purpose		√		√	
Guaranteeing good quality	√	√	√	√	
A clear explanation of the products that will be sent				√	
Supplier information, in general	√				√

CONCLUSION

As a B2B firm that has just started implementing digital marketing during a pandemic, Kijang is having difficulties regarding what approach is appropriate to the needs and wants of its target consumers. Since the start of the business, Kijang has been used to doing direct marketing. During the pandemic, Kijang tried to market the product on the internet by creating a website and social media accounts. Kijang sales are increasing, although they still need to be optimal in reaching the target market.

Consumer analysis is carried out to determine the target market's needs and wants. As a result, respondents still prioritize direct purchases because they need to assess goods and get to know suppliers directly. Some respondents are also unfamiliar with digital technology and refuse to use it. However, some respondents who understand digital technology's development have started looking for suppliers on the internet as an alternative to searching on Google and social media accounts.

Respondents have not found a long-term partner because of some previous unfortunate experiences. They need to get acquainted with suppliers directly to build a more comfortable long-term business relationship. One advantage they want is that they can quickly check the product quality according to their purchasing power. They need a guarantee of trust for a long-term relationship and can regularly order with ease. The proposed marketing strategy for Kijang is to continue and strengthen direct marketing with regular evaluations and optimize existing digital marketing activities according to target customers' needs. These needs are to have access to inspect product material directly through online purchases, obtain price information for comparison purposes, guarantee to receive a good product, obtain information about similar products to be shipped, and general supplier information. Kijang can still carry out current digital marketing activities to increase brand awareness and capture future opportunities.

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