

Marketing Communications During the 2020 Pandemic (Case Study of The Star Fit Grand Paragon)

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ABSTRACT

Health awareness makes individuals make it happen by exercising in the gym, but these efforts have the opposite effect of goals. In March 2020, Indonesia was hit by the Covid – 19 virus outbreak, which has been declared a pandemic. This is a problem for both the consumer and the business owner. As one of the fitness centers affected by the pandemic, Star Fit immediately took action using marketing communications. The purpose of this study is to see and describe the marketing communications carried out by Star Fit to convince consumers and potential consumers to exercise again at the fitness center during the pandemic. The method used in this research uses a qualitative approach and case study methods with data obtained through interviews, observation, and documentation. Personal selling during the pandemic is adapting by taking advantage of messaging and calling applications. Digital marketing is carried out through the use of the internet such as websites and social media. Sales promotion takes advantage of the internet in disseminating the promotion. The combination of the marketing communication mix chosen helped Star Fit faced the pandemic in 2020.

Keywords: Marketing communication, fitness center, pandemic

1. INTRODUCTION

Health is very important for humans because the loss or disruption of health will interfere with individuals in carrying out daily activities. To get a healthy body, it is necessary to make efforts to support health. Prasetyo [1] explains that all activities to maintain and improve health aimed at realizing an optimal degree of health for the community are a health effort.

One of the most important efforts in maintaining health is by exercising. According to Hamada [2] what is meant by health sports is sports that are held to maintain or increase the degree of health. Thus, it has been confirmed that exercise is important in an effort to obtain a healthy and fit body.

Knowing the importance of exercise as an effort to maintain physical health and fitness, sport is a need that must be met by individuals in society. The need for sports opens up business opportunities for a fitness center as a business that provides a place to exercise with the various facilities provided in it.

Efforts to maintain health and gain physical fitness through exercise in the gym, unfortunately, have the opposite effect of goals (backfire). In 2020, to be precise, in March, Indonesia was hit by the Covid – 19 virus outbreak which has been declared a pandemic.

This pandemic certainly worries consumers as members of fitness centers. Because in fitness centers, the modes of transmission of Covid – 19 mentioned by the WHO (World Health Organization) are prone to occur.

Suharjana [3] explains that a fitness center is present to promote sports and get financial benefits for the owner. Consumers who want to exercise with the aim of health and fitness are deterred because they are worried about the transmission of Covid – 19, as well as business actors who are affected due to the lack of consumer interest in coming and exercising at the fitness center.

Fitness center entrepreneurs certainly need to take immediate action to overcome this problem, one of which can be through marketing communications. According to Octavia & Purnama Sari [4], communication activities are aimed at conveying messages to consumers and potential consumers through several media and other channels that can be used to create hopes for three stages of change, namely: change in knowledge, change in attitude, and change in the desired action, is the definition of marketing communication. Marketing communication is a way that business actors need to do to realize changes in the actions of consumers and potential consumers, namely to want to exercise again at the fitness center, which will get back the company's profits.

One of the fitness centers that are experiencing this problem is Star Fit, located in Grand Paragon, West Jakarta. The author chose the fitness center to be researched because Star Fit is a newcomer to the world of a mega gym concept gym, by providing a large area for exercising. The new Star Fit was officially operational in January 2020 and must immediately face a pandemic problem two months after operating initially. The author is interested in knowing how Star Fit as a newcomer to the fitness center business deals with this, precisely in how the marketing communications carried out by Star Fit to convince consumers and potential

consumers to want to return to exercising at Star Fit during this pandemic, which is so the economics of business actors are also walking again through increased membership program sales.

The difference between the author's research and previous research, among others, is the research "Marketing Communication Mix Analysis in Building a Loyalty Coffee Bar Brand" (Prologia, 3 (1), 299–304.), "Integrated Marketing Communication Strategies in Consumer Decision Making in Services Education" (Prologia, 3 (2), 423–432.), And "Analysis of Physical Fitness Programs at Physical Fitness Centers in Yogyakarta" (Medikora, 11 (2), 135–149.) This research focuses on activities marketing communications carried out by Star Fit to achieve the goal, namely that consumers and potential consumers want to return to exercise at Star Fit during a pandemic period or situation. There are clear differences in the research objects, objectives, and situations faced by the company in this study. This is because this is the first time that the Covid – 19 pandemics has occurred and must be faced immediately by Star Fit, a newcomer to the world of a megagym concept gym.

2. METHODS

The research method used in this research is a qualitative approach and a case study method. According to Emzir in Sugiarto [5], research that seeks to find meaning, investigate processes, gain a deep and complete understanding and understanding of individuals, groups, or certain situations are the objectives of carrying out case study research. He also added that interviewing, observing, and studying various documents related to the topic under study were ways to obtain data in the case study research method. The case study method was carried out on Star Fit Grand Paragon WestJakarta's marketing communication activities during the 2020 pandemic.

The subjects in this study were Anang as the marketing manager and Klik as the fitness consultant leader. The research object in this study is the implementation of marketing communication activities carried out by Star Fit during the 2020 pandemic to attract potential consumers and consumers to want to exercise again at the fitness center.

3. FINDING AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the results of interviews as primary data that the author has obtained, the following findings are obtained by the authors, including that Star Fit obeyed all the rules given by the government from the start, such as during the implementation of the PSBB, PSBB transition, to health protocols; Star Fit prioritizes and ensures strict standardization of health protocols in accordance with government directives for the safety and comfort of consumers in exercising at Star Fit, such as through staff who routinely do rapid tests at least once a month and for

new consumers who are entering they must undergo rapid tests, tools and rooms are cleaned and disinfected every two or three hours (regularly periodically), requiring the use of masks and/or face shields.

Star Fit also does not provide towels during the pandemic period to minimize unwanted things, but certainly provides hand sanitizers and alcohol cleaners (disinfectants) in various corners of the area. It is not enough to get there, Star Fit put barriers to maintain a safe distance and minimize the spread of droplets, limit the total number of visitors to keep health protocols running, and limit the total load capacity of classrooms to 50% up to 20% of the actual room capacity. Star Fit performs regular sounding during its operating hours to remind consumers who come to maintain health protocols and staff also take part in reminding consumers directly. Based on the results of the interview, the difficulties experienced by Star Fit during the pandemic and the process of implementing health protocols tended to be with each consumer, namely when some consumers sometimes forgot or still often did not pay attention to health protocols either on purpose or accidentally, but everything was still possible handled well. There was a reduction in members' check-ins of around 50% during the pandemic and there were consumers who exercised their leave, then consumers who came during the pandemic usually had an appointment with a personal trainer, so it could be ensured that safety and health protocols were maintained.

The findings in the implementation of Star Fit marketing communications, among others, are that Star Fit realizes and understands the situation and conditions that occur, namely the pandemic, Star Fit also does not impose coercion on members through the marketing communication media used so that they want to exercise at the fitness center. The marketing communication mix used by Star Fit includes personal selling, digital marketing (website, Instagram, Facebook), and sales promotion.

The communication message communicated to the public is basically Star Fit encouraging consumers and potential consumers (broad audience) to always maintain their health by carrying out routine exercise habits both at home and at Star Fit. Suppose consumers and potential consumers want to exercise at Star Fit. In that case, Star Fit will happily welcome, reassure consumers and ensure that the health protocol is very strict so that consumers and potential consumers feel safe and don't have to worry.

Star Fit realizes that the first problem that must be resolved is to ensure the safety and comfort of consumers and potential customers are always maintained, Star Fit immediately makes adjustments to the health protocols that the company must run according to the standards set by the government, the health protocols carried out by Star Fit among others, as mentioned above. After Star Fit ensures that the health protocol has been implemented properly, then Star Fit communicates the communication messages mentioned above to consumers and potential consumers through the chosen marketing communication mix.

Based on the results of field observations, marketing communication through personal selling was mostly carried out by staff while in the field, staff serving customers and especially potential customers from the start when they

wanted to enter Star Fit. Prospective customers are always greeted with pleasure such as, "Hello, sis. Is there anything I can help? Already a member or want to have a look or ask questions first?" The goal is to build good relationships with potential customers from the moment they arrive, not to forget that during the pandemic, keep wearing masks and keep your distance according to implemented health protocols. According to Kotler & Armstrong in Aprianto & Ayu Candraningrum [6], this personal selling activity is in accordance with the theory, which explains that personal selling consists of interactions between sellers and consumers and potential consumers in maintaining relationships and making sales.

Personal selling in the field is not always carried out smoothly, especially at the beginning of the pandemic, when many people are afraid and worried about going out of the house, especially to the gym. The company also made adjustments by not always relying on personal selling in the direct field, but adapting by taking advantage of advances in communication technology via the internet to communicate personally with consumers and potential consumers. The communication media used are messaging and calling applications, namely Whatsapp. According to McGraw - Hill in Nursatyo & Rosliani [7] internet and personal selling are designed to be complementary tools in increasing sales or increasing personal relationships with consumers. Based on the theory described, the use of the internet or digitalization of personal selling is the right thing to do in helping companies. Adaptation of Star Fit personal selling through Whatsapp is suitable progress to achieve the goal, namely efforts to increase sales by reminding consumers to come and improving personal relationships with consumers. Thus, the essence of personal selling is not lost even though it is bridged by advances in communication technology.

Apart from using Whatsapp as a medium for the implementation of personal selling, Star Fit also uses other digital media as part of the implementation of the next marketing communication mix, namely digital marketing. Digital media used include websites, Instagram, and Facebook. According to Mohammed, Fisher, Jaworski, & Paddison in Wardhana [8], e-marketing is the process of building and maintaining relationships with customers through online activities to facilitate the exchange of ideas, products, and services that provide satisfaction to both parties. Based on this theory, the use of digital marketing is the right thing to do by companies in an effort to build and maintain relationships with consumers and potential consumers, market products, increase sales, and other goals to be achieved, especially during the pandemic. The digital marketing media used by Star Fit include websites, Instagram, and Facebook.

The official website owned by Star Fit has the domain name www.starfitnessid.com. Star Fit uses the site as the official forum for published company information. The information shared on the site includes company profiles, facilities provided, offer programs, class schedules, events, and company contacts. So, suppose there are consumers and potential consumers who want to find out about Star Fi. In that case,, they can easily get it through the official website

that is already available. This this site's existence is in accordance with the aim of increasing market segment, which will also affect increased sales. The site is also able to increase public trust in the company because its existence indicates the professionalism of the company, strengthens the existence of the company, and makes it easier for the audience to find out about the company, all of which are in accordance with efforts to achieve brand goals, namely brand image and brand awareness. It is also in line with the aim of increasing satisfaction and the reference level of consumers and potential consumers to Star Fit.

Based on the theory mentioned above, it proves that the use of sites on the internet by Star Fit is the right way and in accordance with the theory to achieve goals in implementing digital marketing as part of the marketing communication mix. The use of websites on the internet is one of the right steps that have been taken by Star Fit, especially during this pandemic.

Other digital media used include social media, namely Instagram and Facebook, both of which have the username @starfitness.id. According to Van Dijk in Citra Setiawati & Rusdi [9], social media is a forum that focuses on its users and provides facilities for collaboration and activities, this aims to build and strengthen relationships between users. Social media users can access anytime and anywhere because apart from being accessed via a computer, it can be accessed via mobile/smartphone, this provides an opportunity for marketers to be able to conduct marketing communications anytime and anywhere [10].

Through the theories that have been explained about social media above, the use of social media has a function that cannot be separated from building, maintaining, and strengthening relationships. The marketing communication media have chosen by Star Fit so far have the same basic function, namely maintaining relationships with consumers and potential consumers. The marketing communications that Star Fit ran during this pandemic, as far as the authors have analyzed, support and strengthen each other in terms of maintaining relationships with consumers. This is of course very good because the activities have consistent intentions so that consumers are unconsciously influenced or maintained through good relationships and connections with companies.

Videos and photos of the health protocols run by Star Fit are also uploaded through both social media, the goal is in accordance with the communication message, namely to inform that the health protocols run by Star Fit are very maximal so that consumers and potential consumers do not have to worry about exercising at Star Fit because it's safe. Based on the results of the interview, Mr. Klik as a fitness consultant leader who is also responsible for sales took the initiative to use his personal Instagram account to share educational content that motivates sports in an effort to spread communication messages as determined by Star Fit through his official social media.

According to Priansa in Nelviluvita & Oktavianti [11], sales promotion is an effort used by companies as a tool to market products and sharply increase the amount of marketing within a predetermined time. The pandemic has an impact on reducing members' check-ins which of course has an

impact on decreasing sales, so Star Fit needs to make special offers to market products, increasing the amount of marketing sharply in the period during the pandemic. So, Star Fit has made several promos which are also assisted by social media (Instagram and Facebook) with the function of being a promo media, including Star Fit providing special membership price packages with special price packages of 6 months (+1 month), 12 months (+3 month), and 15 months (+15 months) and got free merchandise. This promo is also posted on the Star Fit website.

Sales promotion on the internet medium is very possible for companies to achieve their targets, sales promotions are very effectively applied via the internet [7]. Based on this theory, the implementation of sales promotion by Star Fit using the internet medium in the form of websites, Instagram, and Facebook is the right step in carrying out its marketing communications. According to Strauss and Frost in Pradiani [12], several e-marketing objectives aim to achieve the following: increasing market share; increase sales revenue; reduce costs; achieve brand goals; and achieve the goals of Customer Relationship Management (CRM). The internet is used so that the reach of a wider audience who knows the promo.

Based on the interview results, the purpose of Star Fit social media also functions as promotional media that the author mentioned earlier, is social media in addition to maintaining relationships, exchanging ideas and products, and sharing promo information held by Star Fit. In addition, social media is also an extension of the company's sales department by communicating with consumers and potential customers through the direct message feature, such as if there are questions about product offers and promotions held by Star Fit. So, through the direct message feature on Instagram and Facebook, persuasion and offers are also carried out to increase sales which indirectly also maintain relationships. The Star Fit activity through its social media can be said to be an extension of the personal selling and sales promotion function.

All of the marketing communication mix was chosen and implemented by Star Fit actually has an interconnected basis, namely maintaining good relations with consumers and increasing sales, in order to survive during the pandemic. Based on the theory described above, namely marketing communication as a tool to create three stages of change, including changes in knowledge, attitudes, and desired actions.

In this case, Star Fit which informs and educates its audience, such as health protocols and educational content through the chosen marketing communication mix, is an effort to realize the first stage, namely knowledge change. After a change in knowledge about Star Fit during the pandemic period, it will encourage the audience to change attitude, namely those who were afraid to exercise at Star Fit feel safe and comfortable to come back and exercise at Star Fit. All of this encourages audiences, consumers and potential consumers to have changes in accordance with what Star Fit wants, namely returning customers and buying

programs or products that Star Fit offers in the form of membership, which ultimately results in consumer efforts to obtain and maintain health by exercising can be fulfilled and company sales have also increased. These activities are delivered through the best service through the chosen marketing communication media based on maintaining good relations.

So, the marketing communication activities carried out by Star Fit are by the theory that has been described. Success in marketing communication activities is not measured in this study, but based on the results of observations in the fourth quarter of 2020, consumers and potential consumers are starting to come back so that the number of consumers who exercise at Star Fit is also increasing and starting to get busy again while still paying attention to health protocols. Unfortunately, all marketing communication activities carried out by Star Fit have disadvantages, namely the lack of synergy (integrated marketing communication). Even though the communication activities were carried out very well, based on the results of interviews with Mr. Klik as the fitness consultant leader (responsible for sales), he seemed unsure of the significant synergy between the marketing communication activities carried out by Star Fit in the marketing department with the sales department. This is certainly a bit of a stumbling block that should be avoided so that the company's goals can be maximally achieved.

In addition, it can be said that Star Fit does not have special marketing communication activities during the pandemic, but only an adaptation in marketing communication activities by focusing on maintaining good relations between companies and consumers. However, the lack of planning and synergy or integrated implementation of special marketing communications during this pandemic is understandable because seeing the urgency and uncertain and urgent situations from the beginning of the pandemic, companies must immediately take quick adaptation actions to survive in this pandemic situation.

However, based on the results of interviews, observation, and documentation, as well as the author's analysis, the activities and all marketing communication efforts chosen and carried out by Star Fit have overall been very good. All activities that have been carried out are also not limited to there, there is always room for development to be even better in implementation.

These marketing communication efforts were carried out by Star Fit Grand Paragon West Jakarta during the 2020 pandemic with the aim that consumers and potential consumers want to exercise again at Star Fit during the pandemic period. A marketing communication activity that combines complementary to each other with the basic purpose of maintaining good relations. Based on the results of observations, it can be said that the marketing communication that was carried out was quite successful because many consumers came back to exercise, which in the end the consumers succeeded in realizing their desire to return to Star Fit to maintain health and also automatically the company's sales could also experience an increase again.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Star Fit marketing communication activities during the pandemic period through personal selling, digital marketing, and sales promotion complement each other because the basic functions of each of these mixes are contained in the implementation of each marketing communication mix that has been chosen, namely maintaining relationships, both with consumers and potential consumers. The main key to Star Fit in implementing marketing communications during this pandemic is maintaining good relations with consumers and potential consumers, providing a sense of security and comfort through the communication of the health protocols that have been implemented, and education, through the marketing communication mix that has been selected.

Personal selling carried out by Star Fit during the pandemic was not only carried out directly by salespeople at the fitness center but also adapting to using the messaging and calling application, namely Whatsapp as a medium to remind consumers to exercise on Star Fit which has a safe health protocol, with the aim of maintaining a personal relationship with the consumer. Digital marketing carried out by Star Fit also focuses on the use of internet media, such as the website and social media Instagram and Facebook, through content that focuses on educating the importance of exercise for health, education on how to exercise, and socializing content on health protocols carried out by Star Fit. Sales promotion run by Star Fit apart from distributing flyers in the mall lobby also focuses on providing membership promos which are also disseminated through social media Instagram and Facebook, the direct message feature is also used to communicate promos if there are consumers or potential consumers who interact through this feature, and at the same time, the interaction through direct messages becomes an extension of personal selling activities that maintain personal relationships with consumers and potential consumers.

There are no special ways or things that are of any special significance in implementing Star Fit marketing communications during this pandemic, there is only the adaptation of marketing communications during the pandemic. Although classified as successful in adapting marketing communications during the pandemic, the authors believe that if the implementation of marketing communications is carried out in an integrated and planned manner, the Star Fit marketing communication activities can obtain maximum results. However, this can be understood given the urgency and situation that is full of uncertainty and urgency. Star Fit's quick action, which in fact is a newcomer to the world of fitness centers with a megagym concept (only operating for the first time in January 2020), through adapting its marketing communications to survive during a pandemic is very good and deserves to be appreciated.

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