



# Engaging Indonesian Consumer During Covid-19 Pandemic: An Emphaty-Based Marketing Communication for Fast Food Restaurant

Oktaviana Purnamasari<sup>(✉)</sup>, Amin Shabana, Tria Patrianti, Astriana Baiti Sinaga, and Donny Kurniawan

Universitas Muhammadiyah Jakarta, Jakarta, Indonesia  
{oktaviana.purnamasari, amin.shabana, tria.patrianti, donny.kurniawan}@umj.ac.id

**Abstract.** Covid-19 pandemic has changed the order of human life in various parts of the world, including in Indonesia. The crisis due to the Covid-19 pandemic does not only occur in the health sector, but also in the economic sector. Many brands and companies that both produce products and services must adapt in order to survive and sustain their business in the midst of a pandemic considering that consumers experience a decline in purchasing behaviour. Brands should be able to empathize and understand consumers, since they are in a difficult situation. Thus, empathy-based communication is important. Through its social media platforms, Instagram, Burger King Indonesia tried to establish engagement with their consumers with empathy-based marketing communication approach by carried out the Silent Sound campaign to provide job opportunities for deaf people. The response from Burger King's followers on Instagram was interesting to be studied. Therefore, purposes of this research were to 1) Identify the response of Burger King's Instagram followers on the Silent Sound campaign 2) Describe the engagement that exists between consumers and brand on the Silent Sound campaign. This study used a qualitative approach with virtual ethnographic methods. Data collection techniques based on text analysis on the posts of the Silent Sound campaign on Instagram @burgerking.id in December 2020 and January 2021. This study indicated that using empathy-based marketing communication messages, customers will engage with brands positively. Thus, this would be an advantage for the brand especially restaurants to maintain their relationship with customer during Covid-19 pandemic. The implication of this study strengthens previous research that empathy-based marketing is able to win the hearts of consumers.

**Keywords:** brand engagement · Covid-19 pandemic · empathy · Indonesian · Instagram · marketing communication · restaurant

## 1 Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic, which has lasted more than a year, has had various impacts in life, from health, education to the economy. The industrial world that is affected is

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mainly industries that lead to leisure time such as restaurants, tourism, hotels, cinemas, and airlines. According to data released by McKinsey & Company in November 2020, there was a decrease in spending on consumer goods for Indonesians, including spending on restaurants which fell by 77% and fast-food restaurants which decreased by 75% during the pandemic. Indonesians also becoming more mindful of how they spend their money and were increasingly looking for ways to save money. The tendency to change to less expensive product to save money was increasing 53%, while looking for ways to save money when shopping was enlarging 56% [1].

To deal with this, the restaurant industry needs to use certain marketing communication approach that could build engagement with consumers. Since consumers also need to be understood related to the decrease in purchasing power they experienced. Therefore, it is interesting to study how the marketing communication approach used by fast food restaurants in engaging with consumers, especially through their social media platforms. This study examines the empathy-based marketing communication message approach adopted by one of the fast-food restaurants in Indonesia. Several uploads on the Instagram platform from the restaurant have received positive responses and feedback from consumers. This is a sign that empathy-based marketing communication is one of the ways the restaurant industry can engage with consumers.

### **Marketing Communications**

Marketing communication is one way to attract consumers to have a good relationship with the brand. As expressed by experts, marketing communication is a place where companies try to provide information, direct and remind consumers directly or indirectly about the products and brands being sold. Marketing communications represent the “voice” of the company and its brands and are the means by which companies can create dialogue and build relationships with consumers. From the consumer side, marketing communication also provides instructions for consumers how and why a product is used, by whom, where and when is the right time to use the product. When a company conducts marketing communications, consumers could have a knowledge about the company’s value so they are convinced to try or use the product. Marketing communications also allow companies to connect their brands to everything from people, venues, brands, experiences and many other things. Marketing communication also plays a role in brand equity by embedding the brand in consumers’ memories and creating a brand image. Besides, marketing communications are also used to drive sales and influence shareholder value [2].

The marketing communication mix consists of eight elements, specifically:

1. Advertising
2. Sales Promotion
3. Events and Experiences
4. Public Relations and Publicity
5. Online and Social Media Marketing
6. Mobile Marketing
7. Direct and Database Marketing
8. Personal Selling

In this study, the elements of marketing communication studied are related to the fifth element, particularly Online and Social Media Marketing. Kotler and Keller stated that online and social media marketing is related to online activities and programs designed to engage with potential consumers either directly or indirectly in order to increase brand awareness, improve image or image, to obtain sales from products and services [2].

### **Social Media for Customer Engagement in Restaurant Industries**

During Covid-19 pandemic, restaurants industries are suffered since they had a significant decrease of customer. Using the right elements of marketing communication becomes important to create brand engagement with customers. A study of US and Korean consumers in restaurants sector said that both advertisement/promotion and Social Network Service content are important stimuli of customer engagement and should be properly managed to enhance brand performance. When crafting integrated marketing strategies to improve brand performance, marketers should implement a marketing mix that has a suitable ratio of firm-controlled and user-controlled media [3]. Another study about tools for creating customer engagement for restaurants industry using social media said that community-oriented language increases customers' responses on social media, so that representing a compelling strategy for increasing customer engagement. This study suggests that restaurants should find ways to develop social media postings that reference the vocabulary and customs that arouse a sense of belongingness to a social community, because this language leads to increased customer engagement [4].

### **Empathy-Based Marketing Communications**

Empathy is a core characteristic of helping and caring interactions and thus is fundamental to service. Empathy can reduce anti-social, revenge, discrimination and unethical behaviours in service settings. It can also improve value-in-context experiences for users of service innovations [5]. Several studies indicated that using empathy approach was more effective to deliver message to target audiences.

Research on anti-smoking Public Service Announcement showed that empathy-arousing messages are potentially more effective than fear-arousing ones. Both fear and state empathy were found to have a positive direct effect on persuasion. However, fear also had a negative indirect impact on persuasion by activating psychological reactance, while state empathy also had a positive indirect effect by inhibiting psychological reactance [6]. Another study about the power of hope and empathy in healthcare marketing showed that two types of emotion-based healthcare appeals are more effective than non-emotional appeals [7]. It is agreed that empathy has a significance effect to the consumer. Related to the study of emotional empathy that affected the consumer's propensity to buy fair chocolate, showed the effectiveness of pro-social marketing campaigns in increasing consumers' willingness to pay and purchase intention for fair-trade chocolate. Contextually, consumers with a high level of emotional empathy showed a greater purchase intention as opposed to those with a low level [8].

One of the brands that initially relied on sales from the number of restaurant visitors was Burger King. The decline in the number of visitors due to restrictions on restaurant operating hours as well as the pandemic condition that requires many people to stay at home has affected Burger King and other fast-food brands. Declining sales conditions

made Burger King make various efforts and carry out certain strategies. One of them is empathy-based marketing communication. On November 3, 2020, Burger King Indonesia uploaded an ad on the @burgerking.id account with a quite controversial headline, namely "Order from Mc Donalds". Of course, this is quite interesting for many parties, because Mc Donalds is one of Burger King's main competitors in the world, especially in Indonesia. The content of this advertising message is quite touching, where Burger King asks consumers to keep buying food from any restaurant, not only from Burger King, even from Burger King's competitors. This is because a restaurant or brand must support their employees.

Entering December 2020, Burger King Indonesia is resuming empathy-based communication by launching the "Silent Sound" campaign. The campaign uploaded to the Instagram @burgerking.id account calls for equal rights to work among people with disabilities, including deaf people. Burger King Indonesia stated that they have employed more than 100 deaf employees who are referred to as Deaf Crew at various outlets throughout Indonesia starting from Bali, Makassar and Jakarta. The posts received quite a lot of response, consisting of 91,998,000 likes and 1,113 comments. In addition, there are also other uploads from the Silent Sound campaign which have received a fairly high response from followers. This shows that marketing communications that touch the hearts of consumers have the potential to have a good effect in establishing closeness between brands and consumers. It is interesting to examine whether brand engagement can be formed between Burger King and consumers through an Instagram account. This is because with the formation of brand engagement, a brand will be more remembered by consumers, its image will be better and finally consumers will feel engaged to the brand.

## 2 Methodology

This research approach used a qualitative approach. While the method used in this research was virtual ethnography. Virtual ethnography is an ethnographic method used to reveal the reality, both visible and invisible, of computer-mediated communication between entities (members) of virtual communities on the internet [9]. In virtual ethnographic research, there are three paradigms, namely positivism, interpretive social, and critical. In this research, the paradigm used is interpretive social. In contrast to positivism, the paradigm that emerges from interpretive social science does not see external or visible symptoms, but through internal factors or can be said to be the reasons or forces that move people. Thus, this paradigm directs reading in detail or examining text, which refers to conversations, written words or images to find implied meanings [10]. In line with this, the interpretive social paradigm was chosen in this study because it is considered appropriate to see the deeper context of the texts produced on the @burgerking.id Instagram account and to see the meaning behind the text, including the motives for the production of the text.

In this study, the data collection procedure used was observation on the upload of the Silent Sound campaign in the @burgerking.id account in December 2020. Analysis of the content of the text was carried out on the upload of the Sunyi Bersuara campaign in December 2020, then coding was carried out. The data analysis technique was carried

out in three stages. In conducting this research, the data analysis technique proposed by Miles and Huberman [11] consisted of data reduction, data presentation and drawing conclusions or verification. The data validity test was conducted by triangulating sources through interviews with Burger King consumers who were followers of @burgerking.id and branding practitioners.

### 3 Result and Discussion

The Silent Voice campaign on Burger King Indonesia's Instagram account starts from December 1, 2020 to January 12, 2021. The first one chosen for analysis are those on December 1 because they get the most comments from the audience. The post received 1,113 comments and was liked by more than 91,998 people. Engagement with the audience occurs through positive comments. There were 720 positive comments and 20 negative comments. While the number of reply comments was 151. In addition, there were also 168 inappropriate comments.

The second post that received the most comments was a video about the title "A Message from BK's Crew." This video was about Debby, a BK Crew who is deaf. With the caption entitled Silent Voice with Debbi. This video was part of the Silent Voice Campaign which tells that Debbi, one of the BK Crews can carry out her duties very well and even has many fans from her customers. This campaign seeks to promote equal employment opportunities for people with disabilities. The post received 305 comments and the video was viewed 193,000 times. Positive comments are also scattered on this upload. Some of them are as follows:

*"This is what I call the best BK. Been there at night, my husband and I were surprised too, turned out that BK"* 👍👍

*"Hopefully it will follow in the city of Yogyakarta soon."*

*"Thank you BK for this campaign. Hopefully more and more business sectors will help remove the stigma against friends with disabilities. Greetings #IDInclusive"* 😊🙏

*"This is what you have been waiting for..not only in Bali, expand all over Indonesia so that people with disabilities can also work. Salute to Burger King Indonesia"*

*"RESPECT! THANK YOU BK! GOOD LUCK ALWAYS!!!"* ❤️

*"Do you remember when I cried when we were served by Deaf Friends at BK Ngurah Rai?"*

*"I cried"* ❤️

*"Hopefully it can be in branches all over Indonesia"* 😊 *I'm glad my friends with disabilities can also get equality."*

All posts, both positive and negative, had proven that this campaign really attracts the attention of the public, especially Burger King Indonesia's Instagram followers. This also provides an opportunity for Burger King to be able to interact with its loyal customers or followers, as there were 18 comments that received direct replies from Burger King. The interactions carried out by both followers to Burger King and vice versa

can provide confidence from followers to Burger King that the decision of customers or followers to choose Burger King is indeed the right decision. This campaign also formed Burger King's brand engagement. This is because with empathy-based marketing communications, Burger King will gain respect and a good image from its followers and customers.

### **1. Responses from Burger King's Instagram followers on the Silent Voice campaign**

The post of Silent Voice campaign on Burger King Indonesia's Instagram account that received the most comments from followers was the post on December 1, 2020 with the headline as follow: For Restaurant's Friends and Food Stalls in Indonesia. This post was telling about the equal right to work among people with disabilities, including people who are deaf. Burger King Indonesia stated that they have employed more than 100 deaf employees known as the Deaf Crew at various outlets throughout Indonesia ranging from Bali, Makassar and Jakarta. The post received 1,113 comments and was liked by more than 91,998 people. Engagement with the audience occurs through positive comments. There were 720 positive comments and 20 negative comments. While the number of reply comments was 151. In addition, there were also 168 inappropriate comments.

Second, the post in December 3, 2020, with an illustration of Burger King employee by providing information that Burger King's Instagram followers could contribute to support people with disabilities in obtaining their rights to work equality by using the #SunyiBersuara frame then uploading and tagging Burger King using the hashtag #BersamaKitabisa. This upload had received 1,348 likes and 2 comments, all of which are positive comments. Third, a post congratulating international disability day while providing information that on December 3, 2020, Buger King opened a special store in Jakarta. This post also provided information to customers that follower can interact directly with the deaf crew at Burger King Skyline Thamrin. This post had received 3,913 likes and 43 comments, all of which gave positive responses.

### **2. Description of Brand Engagement on Silent Voice Campaign Posts on Instagram**

The meeting of individuals will result in the association of life in a social group. Along with the development of technology, now interactions can be easily obtained through social media, especially Instagram. This can also be seen on Instagram, communication exists between followers and brands. In the Silent Sound Campaign posts, it can be seen clearly from each post the number of responses to the Silent Sound Campaign through the number of comments. One of the posts that received the most responses was an invitation to help the deaf to get equality at work with a total of 1,107 comments, of which 720 people commented positively. The second post with the most comments was an upload containing a video invitation to join the Burger King family and a way to send a cover letter via email to Burger King. This post received 216 comments.

The number of positive responses obtained from the Silent Sound Campaign could have a good impact on the brand, both in terms of sales and customer trust. This campaign was successful in building brand trust and create engagement. This must be maintained

by the brand. If this trust is maintained, the relationship that exists can bind customers to make product purchases and also improve the brand image in the minds of customers.

This campaign with an empathy-based marketing communication approach done successfully even though there were still negative comments. However, the number of negative comments responding to this campaign is still much smaller than the number of positive comments. This proves that the selection of an empathy-based marketing communication approach in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic is the right choice.

## 4 Conclusion

The responses of Burger King Indonesia's Instagram followers to the Silent Sound Campaign were very good. These could be seen from the large number of positive comments that support to provide equal opportunities for deaf people to get jobs. It is hoped that this campaign will encourage other brands to participate in creating job opportunities for deaf people and other people with disabilities so that they can get their rights in the field of work. The engagement of followers to the brand in the Silent Sound Campaign had provided good feedback for Burger King, both in terms of trust and increasing sales during the pandemic. Each post of the Silent Sound Campaign got its own place in the minds of followers, as evidenced by the many positive comments that came in and also the number of likes. This showed that followers were also interested in contributing to each post that regarding their concern for people with disabilities. Thus, empathy-based marketing communication is one of the tools that could be taken in order to establish engagement with consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic.

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