

Facing the Pandemic through IMC: Wedding Organizers' Social Media Strategy

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Abstract

Nowadays, the internet and social media cannot be separated from people's lives. Especially during the Pandemic Covid-19 that force our society to move their social life into digital. Internet and the social media have become the main source of information and main platform of communication. The pandemic has also impacted many businesses, including the event industry, such as wedding organizer (WO), which relied a lot on face-to-face or direct interaction to run its business. Since the pandemic began, these businesses have had to catch up with shifting its marketing communication strategy through the social media. This study chose five notable Wedding Organizers in Malang as the informants to look more into the strategy. The quantitative approach with a descriptive paradigm was implemented to be able to find out how those wedding organizers took its marketing communication strategy using social media to approach and attract its consumers. All five organizers have been using Instagram as the main platforms to connect with their audience and WhatsApp to communicate with their team. Optimizing the social media features to share visual documentations of events, choosing the perfect moments to evoke emotions and have the right aesthetic, as well as knowing the right message through captions and hashtag are among the strategies applied to stay afloat in the current time. Further research could analyze the challenges in implementing marketing communication strategy post-pandemic, and also develop integrated marketing communication model related to social media optimization.

Keywords

Social Media, Marketing Communication Strategy, Wedding Organizer

1. Introduction

During this pandemic, businesses and industries were affected and had to fight to maintain their sustainability. The workforce is also affected because millions of workers have lost their job. Meanwhile, employees have to adapt to a new working system work from home (WFH) and rely more on technology. Based on the data from the Central Statistics Agency (2020), the most affected sectors of business besides hospitality as well as transportation and warehousing is the entertainment or service sector.

As a business in the service sector, wedding organizer organizations are among the most affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Various restrictions due to the pandemic made, WO experienced a reduction to the cancellation of the wedding party. The ban on crowding, health protocol policies that require the application of social distancing, physical distancing, restrictions on activity hours and so on certainly have a significant impact on the type of wedding organizer service business.

CEO & Founder of Event and Wedding Organizer, Ethel Riadi said the hardest conditions occurred during the early days of the pandemic. The decline was said to be drastic enough to squirm again when restrictions were loosened. From March to PSBB transition in July that August, newlyweds can issue another date, said Ethel in instagram Katadata live themed Wedding Party in Pandemic Period, (Lombok post 2020). During this time, Ethel said, the

wedding party then adapted to the Covid-19 handling protocol. Like, wearing a mask, keeping a distance, checking body temperature, washing hands to limit the number of guests. Moreover, the thing that also challenges wedding organizers (WO) is that doing promotions or marketing activities by holding a wedding exhibition on site, currently cannot be done. The most relevant marketing communication strategy today is to enter the digital area, namely social media.

People's lives today can no longer be separated from internet and cyberspace activities. Including internet users in Indonesia which continues to increase every year. Based on the results of a survey conducted by the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII), until 2021 in Indonesia there are 72.3% of active internet users. Spread throughout the provinces in Indonesia with the most increases in java island by 58.08%, and in Maluku and Papua only by 2.49%, and still growing.

This condition must be able to be adjusted by wedding organizers to enter their prospective customers, so that they do not lose or can maintain their engagement with their target segmentation. From several previous studies related to strategies and research related to the pandemic era and its effect on communication strategies in organizations, there is an opportunity to analyze integrated communication strategies initiated by one of the affected industries, namely the field of MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions) especially wedding organizers (WO). The number of events held offline, or on site, decreased dramatically at the beginning of the pandemic. Along with public adaptation and health protocols implemented, WO has the challenge of strategizing communication marketing.

2.Theoretical Background

2.1 Strategic Communication

The uncertainty in this pandemic forces businesses and organizations to think and work harder to deal with the implications. Change of communication flow is inevitable and everyone, including organizational members must adapt in new routines that heavily rely on technology. Li et al. (2021) mentioned that transparent communication toward organizational members can affect how they handle organizational change during the pandemic, help lessen confusion related to the change, as well as build good relations within the organization. It is necessary for the organization to inform what changes will be implemented, what new procedures to implement and how, and how it will impact to the operational aspect as well as the workers themselves. By maintaining solid communication system during this time, not only would organizations be able to keep up their performance, it will also help ensure satisfaction within the organization and its stakeholders.

Organization's business and communication strategies are revamped time to time according to the need, including in this pandemic. Organizations do not only need to develop strategies to survive with the decreasing income, but also learn about the health and safety issue for the sake of its operational aspect and the way they interact with the customers and other stakeholders. He & Harris (2020) showed that the pandemic has shifted consumer behavior to be more selective in making decision. In service industry, which normally relies heavily on direct interaction between the staff and customers, its interaction model also needed to be adjusted to ensure safety for both parties. In conclusion, organizations have undergone a change of communication strategy between their own members, as well as to their customers and other stakeholders.

2.2 Social Media Communication

Trottier & Fuchs (2014) explained that every computer-based system, including web application, has social aspect because it saves and transmits knowledge which shapes social relations in society. Sajithra & Patil (2013) elaborated social media is an extension and explosion of traditional word-of-mouth network, which is said to be the most effective and truthful way in distributing information. Social media is easy to use, fast, and provide wide network to access and publish information (Siddiqui & Singh 2016), which can shift public opinion, control trend and other agenda related to various issues, such as environmental, politics, technology, and entertainment (Asur & Huberman 2010; pada Owusu-Acheaw & Larson 2015). Meanwhile, Junco et al. (2010) defined social media as a collection of web and internet services that support participation, collaboration, and sharing in community development.

Trottier & Fuchs (2014) classified social media features as followed:

- a. Integrated sociality – social media combine three social activities: cognition, communication, and collaboration
- b. Integrated role – social media display different social roles of individuals in various social context

c Integrated communication – individual’s social media profile is adjusted depending on their role and activity within the community

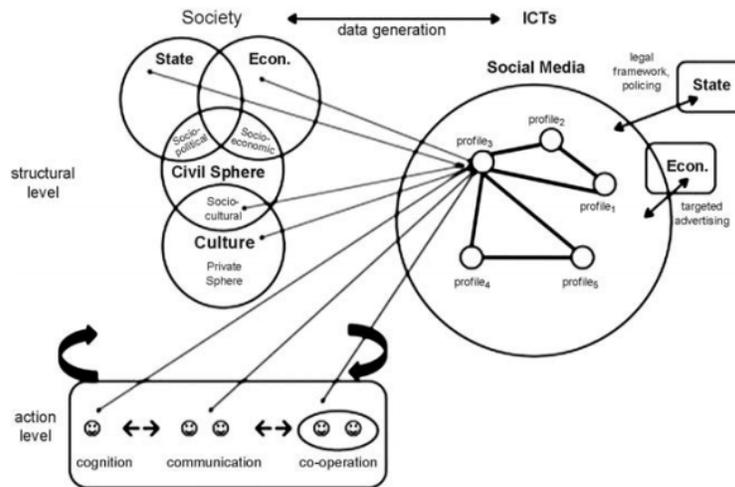


Figure 1. Social Media Communication Process (Trottier & Fuchs 2014)

2.3 Social Media Strategy and IMC

Social media enable many brands and organizations with an abundance of features to create activities and interact with their audience (Figure 1). Especially at times like this, how organizations utilize their social media account could determine the outcome of their strategy. Organizations would aim to create engagement with their audience through their content and message. At the time where an organization’s messages are relayed on social media, careful consideration is needed in designing the right and impactful content.

Šerić (2017) found that social web and IMC, and IMC and brand equity have strong relationship in the hospitality industry. It was also noted that communication consistency is important for the brand, especially to develop relationship with their customers. Brands are also encouraged to convey one integrated voice through their various messages which should be consistent with their brand positioning (Ashley & Tuten 2015).

Customers take in and process various messages from the organization through several touchpoints (Finne & Grönroos 2017), hence the importance of how organization can design their message and content strategy not only in the social media but also in other touchpoints to appeal to their audience. The point of IMC is how the brand, or the organization can integrate different message appeals or strategies into the various touchpoint, yet still having the same, consistent voice of their brand.

Frequent updates and incentives for participation became important in maintaining social media presence, as well as experiential, image, and specific message (Ashley & Tuten 2015). Content with experiential or participation side can be used to evoke certain feel or experience from consuming the content or campaign. However, it also depends on the type of brand, what kind of product or service provided. Brands can post informative, promotional, and entertainment content in combination to provide the audience with the right message at the right time.

3. Methods

This research is a descriptive type with quantitative approach, the research technique used is survey by using questionnaires as data retrieval tools. The data that obtained from the survey are the identity of the Wedding Organizer, the social media platform used, as well as communication strategies for external and internal parties delivered through social media content and other online media.

Primary and secondary data used in this research. The primary data was obtained from the results of surveys conducted online on several Wedding Organizers which has been selected according to criteria. While the secondary data in this

study is obtained from the results of literature studies and other sources that support and relate to the problems studied such as textbooks, journals, articles, the internet, and others.

The population in this study is the entirety of the objects to be examined. In this case the object of the study is a group of selected Wedding Organizers which actively use social media and have more than a thousand followers. Meanwhile, the sample is a small percentage of the population that will be used for research. The sample used in this research has been determined with the following characteristics:

1. Feliz Organizer Indonesia – 12,300 followers
2. Sidorabi Wedding Organizer – 32,400 followers
3. Indies Organizer – 5800 followers
4. Manten Park Organizer – 5369 followers
5. Princess Organizer – 3156 followers
6. Miu Production – 4705 followers

The data in this study was processed including the initial phase of editing, which is the process of re-examining the respondent's answer in the questionnaire whether it is in accordance with the questions, and nothing is missed. The second phase was summing up the percentage of each research question answered through a questionnaire. This process is also called coding which aims to find out the frequency and group of answers selected. After that the third phase was to conduct data analysis by correlating theories and previous research in similar topic. In addition, it was also related to the results of observations and preliminary interviews that have been conducted in order for the resulting data to answer to the questions raised.

4. Discussion

4.1 Respondents' Profile

Wedding Organizer, or commonly abbreviated as WO, is an organization that works the function of managing wedding events. The WO will usually help the preparation activities until the day of the wedding held. The service provided also include preparation from the stage of arranging the legal registration of marriage.

The WO selected as the informant of this research were the WO with the highest number of Instagram followers. It was decided to ensure enough information coverage carried out by the WO. All of them are as follows:

1. Feliz Organizer Indonesia – 12.300 followers
2. Sidorabi Wedding Organizer – 32.400 followers
3. Indies Organizer – 5800 followers
4. Taman Manten Organizer – 5369 followers
5. Princess Organizer – 3156 followers
6. Miu Production – 4705 followers

From the six Wedding Organizers chosen as informants in this study, only five responded to be a part of the research and filled out the questionnaire. It also showed one of the challenges faced in conducting research during this pandemic. All five WOs have been established for more than five years and mostly have around thirty crew members. The monthly turnover of one WO reaches over 100 millions Rupiah, while the two WO have an average turnover of 50-100 millions, and the other two respondents 5-25 million. In terms of business reach, two WOs cover the whole of Indonesia, 2 other WOs reach the East Java region, and 1 WO in Java.

4.2 Wedding Organizer Communication Strategy During Pandemic

The implementation of the strategy by the Wedding Organizers using social media is used to maximize efforts to promote their business. Based on the situation, this research explains how the strategy for maximizing the social media functions they have by explaining what things are the main focus when creating content.

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused a big impact, especially for the event organizer industry, making WO need to consider the right strategy to highlight their brand so that its business can survive and continue thriving in this era. Madray (2020) emphasizes the importance of having an innovative strategy by using technology and promoting it on social media for event management doer. Today's crisis has proven why optimizing technology and social media became crucial for business.

1. Apa hal utama yang anda anggap penting dan harus diperhatikan dalam pembuatan konten ?
5 responses

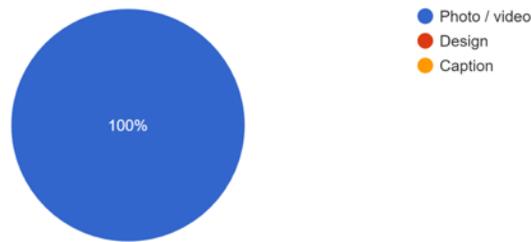


Figure 2. Content Concern of WO’s Social Media

The following chart shows what is the main strength or focus of WO business owners in creating their social media (Figure 2) content, which is the photos and videos containing events coverage or *well-documented* images. The happy, special moment captured can be a force that attracts the attention of the bride and groom and or the bride's family (potential customers) to choose their WO services. As discussed in Virtanen, Björk, & Sjöström (2017) research on Instagram marketing for start-up businesses, business people need to understand well the practice of using social media and also understand the impact of activities carried out on Instagram, as well as other social media. In addition, if optimized, Instagram and other social media are not only useful for increasing customers, but can also help build the brand image (Khan 2018).

Compared to the other option, the chart showed that photo and video is the most priority for the WO to decide that things are choose and important to be post. Nevertheless, it does not mean the other factors are not important, as the informants were also presented with the following question of the consideration to upload a photo or a video.

2. Apa hal penting yang menjadi acuan dalam pemilihan foto yang akan diunggah ?
5 responses

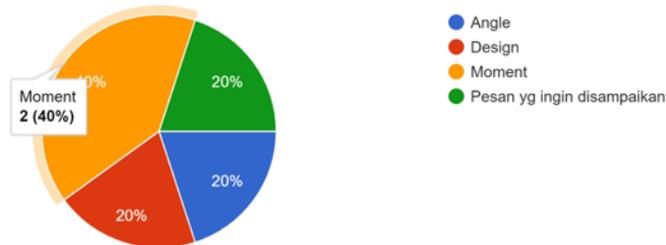


Figure 3. Photo Selection Reason of WO’s Social Media

It is not just photos and videos that are becoming the focus of content uploaded to social media of WO (Figure 3), but for each type of file uploaded, they have important things that become a reference for choosing photos to be uploaded. The design, angle and message conveyed through the photo were all selected by three informants, meanwhile the other two agreed that the moment is considered more important in picking photo that will be shared. It showed that the reference selection of photos uploaded to WO social media is on the right moment from the client's special day. This is believed to be a consideration when uploading a photo.

The importance of choosing photos/videos to be uploaded on WO social media content, conveyed through the dominant opinions of respondents, includes:

1. Meaning
2. Momentum
3. Quality
4. Branding and promotion

5. Function interest arouse

These five points are the main elements that become the standard based for WO as the uploader to arrange and maintain their post. It is beyond than just about the Figure or video record and capturing something, but the memories that can be explain from the pic and video. From what been explain by research informants, it shows that the content selected and uploaded to WO social media must meet the things mentioned above. Writing a right caption gives a good meaning that represents the uploaded photo or video, at the right momentum, with good image quality, will adds value that also will give benefit as WO branding and promotion, this action also has good attraction according to the expectations of their viewers.

According to Schreiber (2017), the distribution or upload of visual content on social media has an aesthetic perspective, which aims to give the expected impression to the audience. How the content is designed and edited can affect the message and impression it makes to the audience. In relation to the visual content shared in the feeds of WO, determining how the uploaded content will represent the appropriate meaning is very important, not only to attract the attention of potential customers, but also to provide the right message according to the character as a WO.

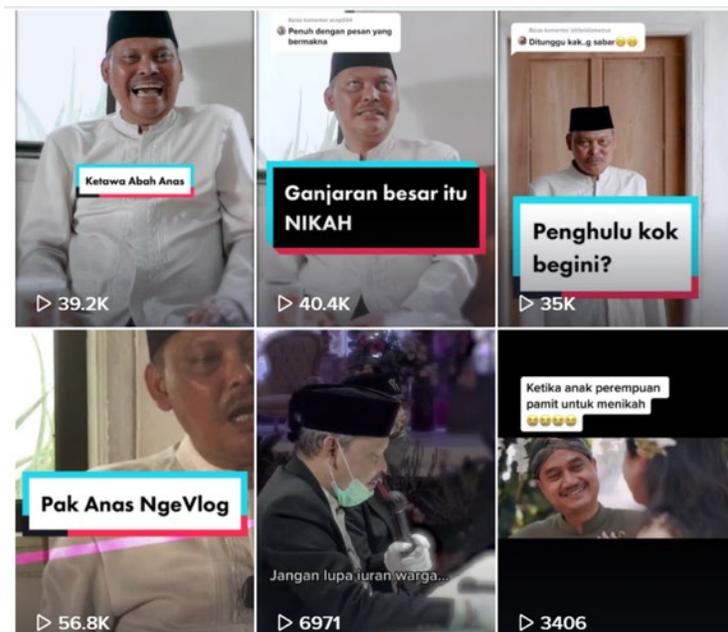


Figure 4. Tik Tok Content from WOs

In addition to photos (Figure 4) and videos that has been uploaded, another consideration as a strategy for WO in managing their social media accounts is the captions because, captions from posts they make are very crucial. As for the caption writing strategy of the uploaded material, in the form of:

1. List of vendors who work together
2. Information related to uploads
3. WO peculiarities, such as taglines

The three informants' answers showed the importance of writing down who the wedding vendors they are working with. This also shows who is willing to cooperate with the team. From the big names of the vendors, as well as the reposts carried out by vendors on their social media accounts. Another important thing that must be ensured is information related to uploads, such as the location, wedding theme, the name of the bride, to interesting things from the event that can be the focus of posts. The last thing that the informants conveyed is the WO's own unique touch, which can be a romantic sentence or a specific tagline from WO. As Feliz did with the hashtag #karenaweddingharusmenyenangkan, showing its focus to make every wedding fun, or the tagline owned by Miu

production because your show is our show too, emphasizing that the customer's event is important for them and they would make the event memorable.

The hashtags on the posts that WO uses on their social media accounts is also important, because it will help boost the search system. The words or sentences chosen are all key words related to the world of marriage (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Feliz Organiser Ig Content

6. Seberapa sering anda mengunggah / upload konten setiap minggunya pada akun WO tersebut ?
5 responses

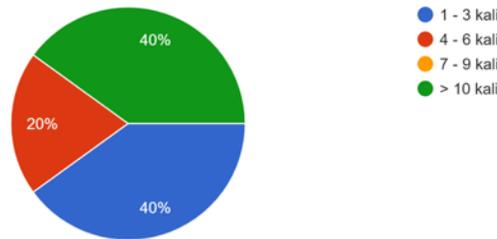


Figure 6. Frequencies of Uploading Content

Another thing that is also considered in managing WO's social media accounts is paying attention to the frequency of how often to upload content to their social media accounts (Figure 6). The data shows that the frequency of uploading content on WO social media accounts varies from 1 to 3 times, 4 to 6 times, to more than 10 times. This is definitely not without reason and is in accordance with the target range and number of wedding events being held. Because it is related with the works of the social media application that will also boost the information spread, and the intention to reach their target.

Content posted on one of the Wedding Organizer's social media accounts, mostly will also be posted on other social media accounts owned and managed by WO. Although there are also research informants who do not always do this, or choose to post their uploaded material on the social media accounts of members or the WO team. This is also with the intention of reaching wider targets and segments, to followers on different accounts and/or followers by share that trough the team or crew's accounts.

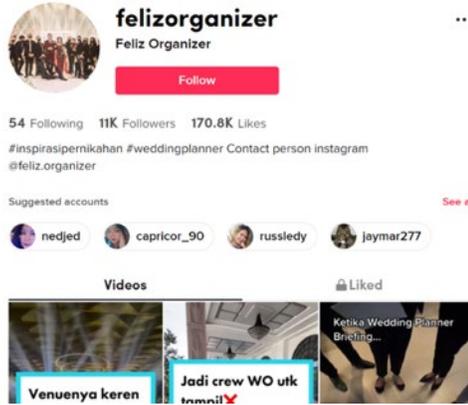


Figure 7. Feliz Organiser Ig Profile



Figure 8. Indies Organizer Ig Feed

During the Covid-19 pandemic, there are important points that form the basis for WO to carry out their functions and duties in carrying out an event or wedding procession (Figure 7 and figure 8). That is understanding and complying with the implementation of health protocols from pre-event to execution or implementation of the Wedding day. This aims to maintain the situation and condition of the spread of the covid-19 virus, as well as maintain the comfort of users of WO services, namely the family of the organizer, as well as invited guests. In line with the results of Madray's research (2020) related to the impact of the pandemic on the event industry, the method of using social media has shifted to become more consumer-centered, dynamic, and engaging, which encourages business people to promote not only their event agendas but also their attention to consumers, including those related to sanitation and health protocols.

Implementation of health protocols carried out during event preparation and implementation, such as:

1. Comply with health protocols according to government standards
2. Carry out preventive actions by facilitating the team with antigen tests and multivitamin provides
3. Committed to providing services to clients who also agree to comply with the applicable protocol rules

These three things show the readiness and professionalism of WO in adapting to the current COVID-19 pandemic situation. Based on our observations, this is also a driving factor for WO's marketing strategy. The readiness of WO to adapt to the provisions of the protocol is one of the basics for prospective customers to decide to use the services of the WO.

4.3 The Most Used Social Media and Network by Wedding Organizer to Maintain the Stakeholder

There are various digital platforms that can be used by business people to communicate with their stakeholders. Based on the data obtained, the most used social media and network used by WO respondents with 100% percentage are Instagram and WhatsApp. Meanwhile other media that used by respondents are Facebook with 60%, Tik Tok 40% and Youtube 20%.

2. Apa saja media sosial komunikasi yang WO anda gunakan ?

5 responses

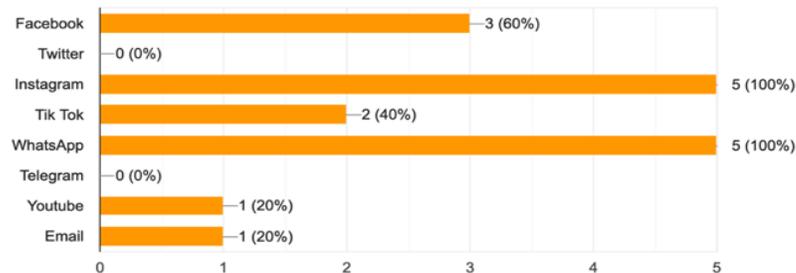


Figure 9. WO's Most Used of Social Media

Indonesia Digital Landscape 2021 by WeAreSocial & Hootsuite (Kemp 2021) shows that in January 2021, Instagram users in Indonesia accounted for almost 42% (Figure 9) of internet users overall. It cannot be denied that Instagram platform is a social media that provides higher interaction results. This is also supported by Rival IQ data (2021) related to high engagement levels on Instagram even with low post rates. In addition, new Instagram features like IGTV and Reels are also important for engagement between businesses and customers. This is also supported by the response from informants who use Instagram as the main social media for their business.

According to the results by Virtanen et al. (2017), the use of social media will give good results if the business is actively engaging with customers. Instagram is also a medium with great potential for businesspeople. Especially in times of pandemics that cause crises in various industries, including businesses in the event management area, it is important to optimize strategies and content on social media.



Figure 10. Most used Communication Medium

During pandemic, digital communication becomes increasingly vital to ensure performance of business and also to optimize the teamwork within organization (Figure 10). For the five respondents, WhatsApp became the main medium for communicating within their teams. Other media also used are Facebook, Zoom, Google Meet. Regarding to the restrictions applied during this pandemic, the frequency of direct meetings becomes greatly reduced. This causes businesses, including WO to take advantage of online meeting platforms such as Zoom and Google Meet. The use of such platforms depends on the needs of each organizer, especially to maintain communication and coordination within the team. For example, Zoom and Google Meet are used for team and client coordination meetings, WhatsApp is used for personal or group communication.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

Pandemic has become a challenge for The Wedding Organizers to maintain its business. Among the impacts is how it communicates to its stakeholders and runs its business. Thus, there are several strategies that have been done to deal with this situation as it follows:

1. Maximizing social media function especially publishing photos and videos and all the documented events.
2. Selecting moment of events that have been documented for publishing to represent feeling and emotions through videos and photos, as well as exhibiting the aesthetics or visual quality of the photos and videos
3. Choosing the right message through the appropriate captions and relevant hashtag, not only to improve the reach of customers, but can also be used to signify its brand characteristic as a WO.
4. Maintaining posting frequency in accordance with the number of events and the expected number of target audience to be reached, aside from for consistency purpose.

5.2 Recommendations

1. Further research could analyze the challenges of implementing marketing communication strategy in social media for the wedding organizer post pandemic

2. Other focus for further research could also develop integrated marketing communication model for social media optimization

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