

## **Marketing Communication Implementation of Periplus and Kinokuniya during Pandemic in Indonesia**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The retail sector in Indonesia, including book retailers, faced considerable challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the country's high literacy index, the reading culture's lack of alignment created ongoing obstacles for bookstores and hindered book sales growth. This research's goal is to comprehend the vital role of marketing communication in assisting companies in navigating unpredictable events like the pandemic. Employing qualitative research and grounded theory, the study collected data through interviews with two customers each from Periplus and Kinokuniya who bought books between 2020 and 2021, then utilized constant comparative method as the data analysis technique. The investigation compares the marketing strategies of both companies during the pandemic, highlighting essential elements. Kinokuniya effectively facilitated purchasing choices by emphasizing DRIP components (differentiation, reinforcement, information, persuasion), while Periplus concentrated on informing and differentiation via notable discount campaigns. However, Periplus could enhance its persuasive aspect. These findings offer insights for refining marketing strategies for uncertain periods for book retailers.

**Keywords:** *Pandemic, Marketing Strategy, Book Retailers, Periplus, Kinokuniya*

### **ABSTRAK**

Sektor retail di Indonesia, termasuk retailer buku, menghadapi tantangan yang cukup berat akibat pandemi COVID-19. Meskipun indeks melek huruf di negara ini tinggi, kurangnya keselarasan budaya membaca menciptakan hambatan bagi toko buku dan menghambat pertumbuhan penjualan buku. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk memahami peran penting komunikasi pemasaran dalam membantu perusahaan dalam menghadapi peristiwa tak terduga seperti pandemi. Dengan menggunakan penelitian kualitatif dan *grounded theory*, penelitian ini mengumpulkan data melalui wawancara dengan dua pelanggan masing-masing dari Periplus dan Kinokuniya yang membeli buku antara tahun 2020 dan 2021, kemudian dianalisis dengan teknik *constant comparative method*. Penelitian ini membandingkan strategi pemasaran kedua perusahaan selama pandemi, dan menyoroti elemen-elemen penting. Kinokuniya secara efektif memfasilitasi pilihan pembelian dengan menekankan komponen DRIP (diferensiasi, penguatan, informasi, persuasi), sementara Periplus berkonsentrasi pada pemberian informasi dan diferensiasi melalui kampanye diskon yang menonjol. Namun, Periplus disarankan untuk meningkatkan aspek persuasifnya. Temuan ini memberikan wawasan untuk menyempurnakan strategi pemasaran pada waktu yang tidak pasti bagi pengecer buku.

**Keywords:** *Pandemi, Strategi Pemasaran, Book Retailers, Periplus, Kinokuniya*

### **Introduction**

The widespread of Covid-19 in Indonesia starting from early March 2020 brought significant effects and challenges to the retail industry in Indonesia, including book retailers. According to the General

Chairperson of the Indonesian Publishers Association (IKAPI) Arys Hilman Nugraha, the strong foundation of reading literacy in Indonesia has reached more than 98%, which means that the population is highly literate. However, this was not aligned with the

reading culture owned by the Indonesian community due to influencing factors such as the availability of reading materials and the development of reading habits (Nugraha, 2021). The COVID-19 has added more to the process interruption of these two influential factors; leading the world of books into a sharp slump in Indonesia.

This study is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding on how the marketing communication implementation is important to be managed in order to help the companies or brands in facing the issues coming from the unpredictable phenomenon that leads to uncertainty—it is difficult to predict when the pandemic would be ended, given that the overall cases of the virus significantly fluctuated within several time spans, either daily, monthly, and even yearly. Besides, this study is expected to explore the results from the implementations in order to identify the marketing communications elements that shall be utilized when the unpredictable outbreak occurred.

A further analysis of the consumers' perspectives towards the marketing communications implementation of Periplus and Kinokuniya during the COVID-19 outbreak is conducted in this study to examine whether the digital promotion activities have supported the consumers' purchase decision. Therefore, there are two main objectives in this study: (1) analyse the consumers' response towards the digital promotion

implementation of Periplus and Kinokuniya during the COVID-19 outbreak, and (2) examine comparatively whether the digital promotion implemented by Periplus and Kinokuniya during the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020 have supported consumers' purchase decision by studying the consumers' response.

In running a business, it becomes essential to conduct promotional activities for the purpose of introducing the business itself and the products or services that they offer. Generally, Fahreza (2020, p. 123) observed that the business needed to create and manage the marketing communications strategies and activities by considering the position of customers before they reach the purchase decision, starting from the awareness, education, consideration, purchase, loyalty, to advocacy. In terms of the efforts, Nadyan et al. (2021, pp. 146-147) believed that maximizing the digitalization is important to help the companies survive their business, especially during the uncertain situation, starting from utilizing E-Commerce, digital marketing, product quality improvement strategy, pricing strategy, and promotion strategy. Referring to the digitalization, Kustiyono et al. (2022, pp. 518-519) observed that the retail businesses have transformed their conventional retails into the digitalized retails as driven by five factors, namely the ability to sell various items, ease the target market to compare prices, the ability to save

time and efforts put out by the target market, various promotions, and the various payment methods.

Specifically discussing about marketing communication implementation during the COVID-19 outbreak, the author of this study took an article written by Rudi et al. (2021) that is relevant to this study. Rudi et al. (2021) analysed marketing communications implemented by Lacku, a Jakarta-based coffee shop. The pandemic led to decreased sales and online shopping trends due to PSBB regulations. Lacku adapted to a take-away concept and used digital platforms, but offline reservations under COVID-19 protocols were more successful.

Another relevant article that discussed about the marketing communication activities during pandemic was written by Gunawan and Sari (2021). In their article, Gunawan and Sari (2021) examined Star Fit, a newly opened fitness centre, highlighting how it utilized strict health protocols in its marketing to attract and retain customers. Although their marketing activities were not fully integrated, the focus on health protocols was acknowledged. AM Production House, studied by Muttaqin et al. (2021), used direct marketing, personal selling, advertising, and sales promotion through social media to increase photography and design service sales. Offline presence was deemed essential. Taha et al. (2021) explored social media's impact on shopping behaviour during the

pandemic, finding gender and age differences in preferences. Overall, these studies emphasize the importance of integrated marketing strategies, both online and offline, to navigate uncertainty and maintain awareness while adapting to changing consumer behaviours during the pandemic.

To facilitate a comprehensive examination of marketing communications implementation by book retailers, the author of this study drew upon prior research exploring online book shopping and reading habits during the COVID-19 pandemic. Gunawan (2019) conducted a study titled "Reading Habits and Buying Books during COVID-19 Pandemic in Indonesia," which revealed how the outbreak altered reading and book-buying behaviors. The shift in habits was attributed to Indonesia's recession during the initial pandemic phase and the subsequent impact on literacy culture. Gunawan (2019) conducted a survey to understand respondents' reading habits and book-purchasing decisions.

Furthermore, Gunawan's survey revealed that Indonesians prioritized basic needs for survival during the pandemic, resulting in a decreased inclination to purchase books despite a heightened interest in enhancing their reading habits. The author contended that marketing communication efforts by bookstores during the pandemic hinged on this desire. Although bookstores heavily digitalized and offered significant

discounts to boost sales, consumers' focus on basic needs superseded their inclination to buy books. Gunawan (2019, p. 11) suggested that embracing technological advancements could aid bookstore survival during uncertainty and economic downturns, particularly by encouraging the target market to maintain reading culture and align it with book purchases.

The author of this study further observed a positive influence on reading habits due to the COVID-19 outbreak, in which it is relevant to the main topic being discussed. In the article "Influence of Covid-19 Pandemic on Reading Habits: A Review of Selected Studies," Sharma (2021, p. 12) highlighted increased reading durations due to mobility restrictions and a shift toward staying at home, diversification in book preferences encompassing academic and non-academic selections, and the utilization of digital media to enhance English skills through reading. Sharma (2021) concluded that the pandemic presented an opportune time for knowledge enrichment through reading, leading to increased reading habits and subsequent book purchasing decisions.

This study's author noted disparate findings in Gunawan (2019) and Sharma (2021), where Gunawan found Indonesian people prioritizing basic needs over book purchases during the pandemic, while Sharma suggested a positive impact on reading habits and increased book buying. These divergent

outcomes reinforce the study's analysis of the critical role of effective marketing communication implementation by book retailers in reaching audiences with distinct priorities during a pandemic.

For an illustrative case depicting the survival strategies of book retailers during the pandemic, the author referenced an article by Fitriani, Kurniasari, and Silvia (2020) titled "How a Bookstore Retailer Survives During Covid-19 Pandemic with Omnichannel Strategy (a Bookstore Retail Case Study)." The article examined how a prominent Indonesian book retailer, Gramedia, navigated the pandemic's challenges through an omnichannel approach. Fitriani et al. (2020) highlighted Gramedia's innovative use of technology, particularly within the omnichannel framework.

Furthermore, Gramedia sought to enhance customer engagement by encouraging visits to physical stores while facilitating online book purchases, despite pandemic-related obstacles. Noteworthy innovations included the Mobile POS system, enabling staff-assisted transactions without requiring visits to cashiers for small item purchases; Self-Check-Out, empowering customers to complete transactions independently regardless of item quantity; and the online store platform for virtual purchases. Fitriani et al. (2020) argued that Gramedia's challenges extended beyond the pandemic and encompassed maintaining

stock availability and optimizing omnichannel experiences.

This study delves into marketing communications implementation by book retailers during the COVID-19 pandemic, drawing insights from Gunawan (2019) and Sharma (2021) on changing reading and purchasing behaviours. The contrasting findings emphasize the importance of tailored communication strategies. Furthermore, the example of Gramedia's survival strategies, as examined by Fitriani et al. (2020), underscores the significance of embracing technological innovations, particularly within the omnichannel context, to navigate challenges posed by the pandemic and beyond.

There are three main theories that will be utilized to support the analysis of this study, namely persuasive communication (focused on elaboration likelihood model), marketing communications, and the AISAS model. These theories will be utilized to describe and elaborate the comparative analysis of the consumers' perspectives towards the digital promotional implementations by Periplus and Kinokuniya.

As the foundational theory underpinning this study's analysis, the author adopts the concept of persuasive communication, a fundamental aspect of marketing endeavours. Taillard (2000) asserts that the primary aims of communication are comprehension and belief, with persuasive

communication serving as the means to fulfil these objectives. In the realm of marketing, Taillard (2000) refers to marketing communications as the practice of persuading audiences, spanning potential to existing customers, to purchase products or services and fulfil the companies' objectives. This process involves utilizing diverse media, including advertisements and technology-based platforms like websites, along with interactive forms of communication—both verbal and non-verbal—that enable real-time, two-way engagement.

Within the expansive landscape of marketing communications, Taillard (2000) recognizes potential challenges. Firstly, attention is drawn to the effects of persuasion through ostensive and covert marketing strategies. Ostensive persuasion involves direct and informative communication with audiences, while covert persuasion employs indirect methods, often relying on peripheral cues to convey messages. However, with increasing audience awareness and familiarity with persuasion tactics, the efficacy of covert strategies diminishes as audiences become adept at discerning the marketer's intentions.

Beyond the nuanced strategies of ostensive and covert persuasion, trust emerges as a pivotal concern in marketing communications. Taillard (2000) asserts that trust plays a crucial role in facilitating optimal relevance guarantee, enabling audiences to

fully engage with marketers' messages and, consequently, affecting attitude change.

Among various theories of persuasion, Dainton (2005) examines four: social judgement theory, elaboration likelihood model, cognitive dissonance theory, and narrative paradigm. In this study, the focus rests on the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), developed by Richard E. Petty and John T. Cacioppo in the 1980s, which delineates how persuasive messages influence attitude change based on the level of elaboration. Meanwhile, O'Keefe (2008) delves into the ELM, elucidating two persuasion routes predicated on elaboration depth: the central route and the peripheral route.

The central route entails recipients thoughtfully considering issue-relevant factors, engaging in extensive cognitive processing. Conversely, the peripheral route relies on peripheral cues rather than in-depth cognitive analysis. Several factors influence the extent of elaboration and the chosen persuasion route, categorized as influencer-related to elaboration motivation and influencer-related to elaboration ability.

Elaboration motivation hinges on the personal relevance of a topic, with greater personal relevance leading to heightened motivation for cognitive elaboration. Additionally, the receiver's "need for cognition," reflecting a proclivity for deep thinking, impacts elaboration motivation.

Elaboration ability, on the other hand, is contingent on factors such as the recipient's prior knowledge of the subject and the presence of distractions. These factors collectively determine the likelihood of central or peripheral persuasion.

Under central-route persuasion, message effectiveness hinges on the recipient's thorough consideration of issue-relevant arguments, with the predominant valence of these thoughts determining persuasive success. The quality and strength of message arguments, along with their valence, play integral roles in shaping the recipient's attitude change.

In peripheral-route persuasion, the recipient relies on heuristics, or cognitive shortcuts, to form attitudes. These heuristics include assessing the communicator's credibility, personal liking for the communicator, and the consensus of others' reactions to the message. These heuristic principles guide attitude formation with limited cognitive processing. However, heuristics diminish in influence as elaboration increases, emphasizing central-route persuasion when recipients engage in deeper cognitive processing.

In the context of this study, the Elaboration Likelihood Model is employed to discern the persuasion route evident in the digital promotion strategies of Periplus and Kinokuniya during the COVID-19 outbreak in Indonesia, specifically between 2020 and

2021. Additionally, the semi-structured interview outcomes will be analysed to gauge the level of persuasive success by considering the influences and factors outlined within both central and peripheral persuasion routes.

The second theory employed by the author of this study to underpin the analysis revolves around marketing communications. Fill and Turnbull (2016) elucidate two overarching forms of exchange: transactional and collaborative. A transactional exchange centers on short-term goals and self-interest, whereas a collaborative exchange is rooted in enduring relationships, prioritizing long-term perspectives (Fill & Turnbull, 2016, p. 8). Merging communication and exchange concepts, Fill and Turnbull (2016, pp. 9-10) expound upon the emergence of marketing communications within the realm of exchange processes. This concept encompasses researching customer needs, identifying target groups, crafting offerings to fulfill these needs, and raising awareness among target audiences regarding the existence of these offerings. As such, this exchange process constitutes the foundation of the marketing mix's 4Ps framework, with marketing communications playing a pivotal role in facilitating this comprehensive approach.

Expanding on this, Fill and Turnbull (2016, pp. 16-17) outline four core communication tasks intertwined within the exchange process. Firstly, communication

serves to inform and raise awareness among potential customers regarding the products or services provided by companies or brands. Secondly, communication acts persuasively, compelling both current and potential customers to participate in exchange networks. Thirdly, communication reinforces experiences by recalling past transactions, and lastly, it differentiates competing companies or brands offering similar products or services. This nexus of communication and exchange forms the foundation of marketing communications, encapsulated by the widely recognized DRIP tasks: Differentiation, Reinforcement, Information, and Persuasion (Fill & Turnbull, 2016, p. 17).

Drawing on distinct forms of exchange, namely transactional and collaborative, while comprehending the scope, role, and tasks inherent in marketing communications, Fill and Turnbull (2016) craft a definition. They conceive marketing communications as a dynamic process fostering engagement between organizations and audiences, wherein organizations immerse themselves in audience environments to discern preferences and devise influential strategies for conveying pertinent and significant messages. Within this interplay, audiences are expected to respond attitudinally, emotionally, and behaviorally, fostering a reciprocal relationship that is sustained and enriched. In

essence, marketing communications is an engagement process encompassing differentiation, reinforcement, information, and persuasion (Fill & Turnbull, 2016, p. 21).

At the core of effective marketing communications lies a robust strategic foundation. According to Fill and Turnbull (2016, p. 152), within the context of marketing communications, a strategy embodies the design, implementation, and evaluation of courses of action aimed at realizing predetermined objectives. In a broader context, the process of crafting a marketing communications strategy entails an audience-centered "overall approach" to achieve marketing and communications objectives (Fill & Turnbull, 2016, p. 153). This overarching approach is framed by four key interpretations: positioning, audience, platform, and configuration.

Following the configuration of a strategic approach, the subsequent crucial consideration pertains to actualizing the strategy and ensuring its alignment with set objectives. Thus, marketers are tasked with devising and coordinating elements of the promotional mix. This mix encompasses a spectrum of components, including advertising, digital marketing, sales promotions, personal selling, direct marketing, and public relations.

The third theoretical framework guiding this study delves into the AISAS model. The selection of this theory aligns

with the study's backdrop, which underscores a significant correlation between purchase decisions and digital promotions.

As the background of the development of AISAS Model, Sugiyama and Andree (2011, p. 51) highlight the challenge businesses encounter in sustaining customers' attention toward their products and services. A critical issue at play is the phenomenon of Information Barriers, wherein customers predominantly seek specific information aligned with their interests. Expanding on this notion, Sugiyama and Andree (2011, pp. 53-54) dissect three core facets of Information Barriers: the rapid surge in information volume, customers' heightened proactivity in information-seeking, and the escalating challenges in discerning one product from another.

In response to these Information Barriers, Sugiyama and Andree (2011, p. 51) contend that businesses must adopt innovative strategies capable of both generating and maintaining customers' interest in the promotional undertakings orchestrated by these commercial actors. This urgency is underpinned by the dynamic shift in the information landscape that accompanies evolving consumption behaviors within the contemporary era (Sugiyama & Andree, 2011, p. 77).

Historically, marketers embraced the AIDMA model—Attention, Interest, Desire, Memory, and Action. This model postulates a



linear flow of information directed toward consumers, who then respond in a straightforward manner. However, owing to the aforementioned Information Barriers and technological advancements, Sugiyama and Andree (2011, p. 78) unearthed a novel consumer behavior model: AISAS—Attention, Interest, Search, Action, and Share.

Embracing a nonlinear framework, Sugiyama and Andree (2011, pp. 80-81) expound upon the sequential stages of the AISAS model. The consumer's journey commences with noticing a product, service, or promotional endeavour (attention), followed by cultivating an interest in it (interest). Subsequently, the consumer embarks on information gathering about the subject of interest (search). In this phase, the Internet becomes a potent tool, offering access to a plethora of information, spanning from official company websites and product comparisons to user reviews.

Armed with the gathered information, the consumer progresses to evaluating the overall information sources, culminating in a decisive purchase choice (action). Importantly, in the AISAS model, this stage is not terminal. The consumer proceeds to share their first-hand experience of the purchased item, transmitting Word-of-Mouth information through direct conversations or online community platforms, such as blogs (sharing).

In contrast, the linear AIDMA model extends the Interest stage to Desire, wherein consumers promptly develop a yearning to acquire the advertised product. This desire is intertwined with the consumers' recollection of an impactful, effective advertisement, ultimately propelling them to the stage of purchase decision (action). According to Sugiyama and Andree (2011, p. 78), these stages within the AIDMA model prove efficacious for traditional advertising of straightforward products, where consumers lack extensive motivations for comprehensive product knowledge.

Incorporating the AISAS model into this study offers a nuanced lens through which to examine the interplay between digital promotions and purchase decisions, particularly within the intricate context of Information Barriers and evolving consumer behaviour. This framework underscores the multifaceted dynamics that influence consumers' interactions with promotional activities, emphasizing the significance of attention, interest, information seeking, action, and sharing as pivotal components of the modern consumer journey

## **Research methods**

This study employs a qualitative approach to investigate book retailers' marketing communications during the pandemic. Aligned with this approach, the study delves deeply into Periplus and

Kinokuniya's COVID-19 era marketing communications and examines target market perspectives.

The grounded theory method will be utilized for analysis, as proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1960s), characterized by simultaneous data gathering and analysis, analytical codes derived from data, constant comparative method, hypothesis advancement, memo-writing, non-representative sampling, and post-analysis literature review (Charmaz, 2006, p. 5). Grounded theory unravels qualitative analysis complexities, revealing human experiences and fostering theory development (Charmaz, 2011, p. 165).

Grounded theory relies on iterative cycles between data collection and analysis, guiding both through evolving memos and theoretical categories. Memos, detailing categories' characteristics, data explanations, and comparisons, evolve as the researchers delve deeper into their topic (Charmaz, 2011, pp. 165-166). This iterative approach shapes data collection by employing emerging theoretical categories to guide targeted data gathering, refining categories as the study progresses (Charmaz, 2011, p. 166). By staying engaged with data and applying comparative analysis, grounded theory researchers develop theoretical categories and explore event connections (Charmaz, 2011, p. 166).

Comparative analysis plays a central role, comparing prior and emerging data, revealing category relationships, and explaining concept connections (Charmaz, 2006, p. 21). The grounded theory approach aligns with this study's focus on consumers' perspectives regarding Periplus and Kinokuniya's digital promotion implementations during the pandemic, obtained through coded interview transcript analysis (Charmaz, 2006, p. 21).

Regarding the research methodology and the approach used to gather comprehensive data through semi-structured interviews, the data analysis technique employed in this study involves a multifaceted system of coding procedures. Data analysis encompasses the researcher's active involvement, aligning with the principles of grounded theory. In this context, the theory is both formulated and uncovered by the researcher, who engages in intervention, manipulation, conceptualization, and application of specific methodologies to derive meaningful insights. This intricate process involves multiple phases or steps to extract theory from raw data.

Distinguished by its advanced and specialized use of coding, grounded theory sets itself apart from other qualitative methodologies. Coding is the pivotal analytical process at the core of the researcher's work, serving as more than just a

component of data analysis. Rather, it serves as the conduit that translates data and research from transcripts into coherent theoretical constructs. Walker and Myrick (2006, p. 549) emphasize that grounded theory is inherently linked with coding, defining it as the fundamental process through which researchers derive meaning from data.

Within the initial coding phase, three distinct practices are employed: word-by-word coding, line-by-line coding, and coding incident to incident. Word-by-word coding entails meticulous scrutiny of each word in the data, allowing researchers to discern nuanced meanings and patterns (Charmaz, 2006, p. 50).

The second practice, and one particularly pertinent to this study's analysis, is line-by-line coding, which involves categorizing every individual line of textual data (Charmaz, 2006, p. 50). This coding approach facilitates the identification of both overt and implicit concerns and statements expressed by the interviewees. Charmaz (2006, p. 50) underscores that line-by-line coding delves into intricate empirical issues and processes, making it especially well-suited for analyzing detailed interview data. This method enables researchers to observe and examine closely the actions, behaviors, and situations described in the data, revealing informative and significant scenes.

Subsequently, a comparative analysis of incidents under investigation (namely, the

digital promotional activities of each bookstore) is undertaken, aligning with the research question and objectives. Charmaz (2006, p. 53) elucidates that grounded theorists engage in comparative analysis to gain new perspectives and insights. In the context of grounded theory, the constant comparative method is widely acknowledged. This method involves creating analytical distinctions and conducting comparisons at each stage of analytical activity, regardless of the data unit initially selected for coding (Charmaz, 2006, p. 54).

In sum, the application of grounded theory involves a comprehensive approach to coding, with its fundamental practices—word-by-word and line-by-line coding—culminating in a comparative analysis that sheds light on new analytical dimensions. This methodological framework enhances the researcher's capacity to uncover and comprehend findings in a novel and incisive manner, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of the studied phenomenon.

### **Research Findings**

It has been observed that each informant had various perspectives towards the promotional and media mixes of each researched bookstore. Besides promotional and media mixes, this study illustrates the comparisons of the AISAS Model fulfilled by each informant in order to present their responses towards the digital promotion

activities of each bookstore during the COVID-19 outbreak in Indonesia.

Utilizing the elaborate Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), the central communication theory in this study, in conjunction with informant perspectives, a comprehensive exploration of persuasion routes and the level of persuasive success was conducted. The research delved into the complex interplay between digital promotional activities by Periplus and Kinokuniya during the pandemic and their impact on consumer purchase decisions. The findings shed light on the multifaceted nature of consumer responses to these promotions, revealing varying degrees of engagement and persuasiveness among different informants.

The analysis unveiled distinct patterns of persuasion among the informants. Informant 1 displayed a peripheral-route persuasion, where personal considerations outweighed the influence of digital promotions. Her decision-making process was grounded in factors such as the suitability of promoted books to her needs and the efficiency of delivery services. This approach implied a lower level of elaboration due to the limited relevance of the promotional content to her preferences. Despite this, the credibility of Periplus as a trustworthy source played a pivotal role in shaping her repurchase tendencies.

In contrast, Informant 2 showcased a central-route persuasion, driven by a deeper

level of elaboration. Her engagement with Periplus' digital promotions extended beyond surface-level considerations. She offered insights into the alignment of discounts with women's interests and the effectiveness of promotional activities on Instagram. Her observations highlighted the significance of visual content on different platforms and suggested avenues for enhancing the promotional strategies. This central-route approach, characterized by a more thorough cognitive processing of promotional messages, demonstrated the potential for greater persuasive impact.

Similarly, Informants 3 and 4 also exhibited central-route persuasion tendencies, reflecting their extensive contemplation of digital promotions. Informant 3's engagement was particularly influenced by the personal relevance of Kinokuniya's promotions. The emphasis on online purchases due to the limited accessibility of offline stores resonated with him. For Informant 4, an evolution in Kinokuniya's Instagram content demonstrated the power of tailored promotions to capture wider audiences. These examples underscore the nuanced ways in which central-route persuasion manifests, driven by factors ranging from personal relevance to evolving content strategies.

Drawing on the discussions and analysis, the integration of marketing communications theory in this study finds a strong alignment with the concept of

Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC). IMC, as elucidated by Clow and Baack (2017), seeks to optimize customer impact through the seamless coordination and integration of various marketing communication tools, channels, and sources within a business. The holistic nature of IMC encapsulates the essential components of the marketing mix—products, prices, distribution strategies, and promotions (4Ps)—into a comprehensive plan.

Examining the pandemic-era digital promotion strategies of both Periplus and Kinokuniya, it is evident that a complete IMC plan was executed. Leveraging distinct online platforms, the bookstores strategically positioned their products, primarily imported books, with competitive pricing, a crucial aspect for capturing consumer attention. The promotions themselves, such as enticing discounts, were tailored to address the specific challenges posed by the pandemic and to resonate with the target audience.

The distribution strategies of Periplus and Kinokuniya further highlighted their commitment to IMC principles. Periplus harnessed its official website to create a user-friendly interface for showcasing promoted products. Kinokuniya, on the other hand, leveraged its official Instagram account to disseminate promotions effectively, directing customers to its e-commerce platform for seamless purchases. These distribution tactics, coupled with advertising, sales

promotion, direct marketing, and digital marketing efforts, epitomize the comprehensive IMC approach adopted by both bookstores.

Considering the AISAS Model, which emphasizes overcoming Information Barriers to maintain consumer attention, Periplus and Kinokuniya strategically employed this approach to mitigate challenges posed by the pandemic. By dissecting the AISAS Model—Attention, Interest, Search, Action, and Share—through the lens of the informants' responses, it becomes evident that both bookstores navigated each element to create an engaging and informative consumer journey. The digital promotions served as a bridge to overcome the Information Barriers by capturing attention, piquing interest, facilitating searches, driving actions, and encouraging sharing.

In conclusion, the convergence of the Elaboration Likelihood Model and IMC principles provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the intricate dynamics between digital promotions and consumer purchase decisions. The central and peripheral persuasion routes, as revealed through informant perspectives, underscore the importance of personal relevance, credibility, and cognitive engagement in shaping consumer responses.

By seamlessly integrating marketing communication tools and channels, Periplus and Kinokuniya exemplified the efficacy of

the IMC approach in optimizing customer impact. Moreover, the AISAS Model offers a lens through which the strategic utilization of digital promotions can effectively overcome Information Barriers and foster meaningful consumer engagement. This study advances our understanding of persuasive strategies in the digital realm and provides valuable insights for businesses navigating the complex landscape of consumer behavior during unprecedented times.

### **Discussion**

The objective of this study has been to identify and analyze the parallels in how Periplus and Kinokuniya's digital promotional activities facilitated consumer purchase decisions during the COVID-19 outbreak in Indonesia from 2020 to 2021. Specifically, this research underscores the need to comprehend the relevance of digital promotions amidst uncertainty caused by unforeseen circumstances. The study also addresses the challenge of nurturing a reading culture in Indonesia despite a strong literacy index, leading to the imperative for bookstores to adapt their promotional strategies. This sub-chapter aims to comprehensively answer the research question, supported by theoretical frameworks and literature, drawing conclusions from previous chapters and sub-chapters.

Summarizing consumer viewpoints on the digital promotion activities of the researched bookstores, it is evident that Periplus employed a comprehensive approach, integrating advertising, sales promotion, and direct marketing. This integration conveyed consistent messages across various media platforms like Instagram, Periplus.com, and email marketing. Kinokuniya, however, primarily relied on advertising and sales promotion, predominantly via social media and e-commerce. Notably, Kinokuniya's official website appeared outdated and social media was emphasized to compensate, particularly on Instagram. These findings align with the observation that digital technologies helped retail businesses survive the pandemic.

Contrasting with previous studies, which emphasize offline presence, this research focuses on consumers' perspectives on digital promotions by the researched bookstores. Both Periplus and Kinokuniya exhibited distinct promotional strategies during the pandemic. Periplus relied heavily on large discount events, whereas Kinokuniya employed various promotions with appealing visual strategies. Kinokuniya's efforts extended to e-commerce, a key element not extensively covered in prior research.

Analyzing strategies from both bookstores, a comprehensive approach encompassing differentiation, reinforcement, information, and persuasion (DRIP) emerged

as more effective. Periplus fulfilled the inform and differentiate aspects through discount promotions, reinforcing customers with repeated discounts, though it partially met persuasion. Kinokuniya stood out by employing visuals, diverse themes, and a stand-out online shopping solution, fulfilling all DRIP elements.

In terms of practical implications, book retailers should consider these findings to design effective digital promotional strategies amidst uncertainty, maintaining brand awareness and customer relationships. Theoretical implications suggest reliance on the AISAS Model, which resonates with evolving information environments and consumption behaviours.

In conclusion, further studies should explore communication theories and strategies for digital promotions by book retailers to support consumer purchase decisions, including both marketing communications and integrated marketing communication (IMC) approaches. Additionally, future research should consider retailer perspectives, beyond consumer viewpoints, as well as broader consumer perceptions encompassing reputations, reviews, and sales.

### **Closing**

The present study focuses on analyzing consumer responses to the digital promotion strategies employed by Periplus and Kinokuniya bookstores during the

COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia. It also aims to comparatively assess whether these digital promotions influenced consumers' purchasing decisions and examines their responses to these strategies. Additionally, the study emphasizes the significance of effective marketing communication management for addressing challenges arising from unforeseen phenomena.

Comparative analysis reveals that Kinokuniya has executed a more comprehensive strategy that encompasses key aspects and segmentation elements of the DRIP (Differentiate, Reinforce, Inform, Persuade) communication model discussed in Chapter I. Kinokuniya distinguished itself by offering a standout online shopping solution and employing distinctive, attention-grabbing visuals. This bookstore reinforced its messages of online book purchasing through its various online platforms, contributing to positive purchase-related behavior among its customers.

In contrast, Periplus successfully achieved the "inform" and "differentiate" elements by prominently featuring discount promotions with significant price reductions of up to 90%. The repeated emphasis on discounts served to reinforce these messages, reminding customers of the value proposition. However, Periplus fell somewhat short in fulfilling the "persuade" element, as evidenced by the experiences of the Periplus informants.

Apart from assessing digital promotion implementations, the study also delved into consumers' viewpoints on potential improvements for future strategies by Periplus and Kinokuniya. Collecting feedback from interviewees, the study concludes that enhancing main information sources such as the official website, fostering relationships with book clubs or communities, diversifying promotion focus beyond discounts to include product and author knowledge, and devising strategies to reach a wider audience are crucial takeaways for both Periplus and Kinokuniya. These suggestions are derived from the evaluation of digital promotion activities during the COVID-19 outbreak in Indonesia spanning 2020 to 2021.

In summary, the study underscores the importance of effective marketing communication management, particularly in navigating challenges stemming from unpredictable phenomena like the COVID-19 pandemic. Kinokuniya's approach to digital promotion stood out, incorporating various DRIP elements to encourage positive purchase behavior. Periplus, on the other hand, effectively conveyed information and differentiation through discount promotions but exhibited room for improvement in persuasive messaging. Moving forward, enhancing information sources, building community relationships, broadening promotion focus, and implementing

audience-oriented strategies emerge as essential recommendations for both bookstores based on consumer feedback garnered during the pandemic period.

As the academic recommendations, this study opens a new research possibility which provides a comprehensive understanding on how the marketing communication implementation is important to be managed in order to help the companies or brands in facing the issues coming from the unpredictable phenomenon that leads to uncertainty. The marketing communications elements that have been identified and discussed in this study shall be considered in exploring new research, knowing that the identifications were mostly based on the perspectives of the consumers and their personal experience.

The improvement ideas shared by the informants above are also considered the practical recommendations in this study for the practitioners to shape their marketing communication strategies that meet the interest of the customers and thus can support their purchase decision. The practitioners in this context include the companies, brands, or marketers that are not limited to book retailers. They must understand their customers comprehensively, so that each of the marketing communication element—promotional mix and media mix—can be integrated to deliver the messages that are aligned with the objectives.



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