



Benefits of WhatsApp as a Communication Media on Small Business Social Networks

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Abstract

The production and marketing processes in small businesses are supported by social networks. These social networks are supported by good communication. During the Covid19 pandemic, the use of WhatsApp as a social media was a solution to communicating online. This study aims to analyze the benefits of WhatsApp as a communication media on the social network of the Farizka Fashion jeans convection business. This study uses a social network theory. This research used qualitative method with a case study strategy. The research informants were determined based on purposive sampling technique. The research informants consisted of one key informant, ten main informants, and one supporting informant. Primary data were obtained through non-participant observation and in-depth interviews, while secondary data were obtained through documentation. The validity of the research data used triangulation of data sources. Data analysis technique used interactive model. The results of this research are the benefits of WhatsApp as a communication media on the social network of the Farizka Fashion jeans convection business in the production sector, namely WhatsApp group is used to communicate about work and build a social relation

Keywords: communication, social network, WhatsApp

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INTRODUCTION

This research was conducted on a jeans convection business, namely Farizka Fashion. Jeans convection business includes the production process and the marketing process for jeans products to the market. These processes are supported by the existence of social networks. Networks facilitate social interaction between their members through investing in a high degree of trust in communication (Casson 2012). That is why communication plays an important role for organizational success (Hargie 2016).

Farizka Fashion is a jeans convection business located in Wonopringgo Subdistrict, Pekalongan Regency, Central Java Province, Indonesia. As many as 40% of the population of Pekalongan Regency work in the processing industry (Indikator Kesejahteraan Rakyat Kabupaten Pekalongan 2019 2019). The textile industry in Pekalongan Regency consists of 84 business units with 14,492 workers. Meanwhile, the clothing and apparel industry specifically consists of 153 business units with 4,912 workers (Kabupaten Pekalongan dalam Angka 2020 2020).

In Wonopringgo, there are many jeans convection businesses which are small industries or home industries that do not have a business license. The small industry in Wonopringgo Sub-district absorbs 3,061 workers and the micro industry absorbs 2,763 workers (Kecamatan Wonopringgo dalam Angka 2019 2019). Farizka Fashion is a small business that does not have a business license yet.

The process of producing jeans by Farizka Fashion is carried out in a chain from one jeans convection business actor to another. Every day the boss visits each foreman's workplace to check the production process. Then the jeans product marketing process is carried out offline and online. Offline marketing, every Monday and Thursday, the boss and production assistant offer jeans products directly to market traders in Klewer Market located in Solo City, Central Java, Indonesia. Online marketing is carried out through the Shopee market place and social media Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, many workers have to work from home (Xiao et.al. 2021). Indonesian government implemented physical distancing and Work From Home (WFH). Health protocols are also strictly enforced to prevent the spread of this virus. Kusumastuti's research using descriptive qualitative methods, shows that the Covid-19 pandemic has reduced the productivity of small businesses in Indonesia (Kusumastuti 2020).

So far, the social network that is formed among production actors and among marketing actors is supported by face-to-face communication. After the Covid-19 pandemic, the boss could no longer make regular visits to the foreman's workplace, moreover visits to market in other city. This is an obstacle to the smooth running of the Farizka Fashion jeans convection business.

A successful company must have managers who can communicate well with people at all levels (Hargie 2016). As Okoro et. al. (2017) say in their study, communication is very necessary to solve work and personal problems in the work environment. In the era of the Covid-19 pandemic where many Indonesians carried out WFH, the use of various media and technology has changed the pattern of face-to-face communication into communication through technology (Putri and Irwansyah 2020). Social media, such as WhatsApp, are used to widely distribute information (Wong et. al. 2021).

According to research by Rahayu and Laela, the use of social media affects the level of entrepreneurship (Rahayu and Laela 2018). Small businesses can use ecommerce and online applications as an effort to adjust to the Covid-19 pandemic situation (Kusumastuti 2020). Research by Zafar, et. al. (2017) in Lahore, Pakistan, demonstrated the importance of social networks and social media for communication and for promoting products. Olanrewaju (2020) has reviewed 160 papers and the result is that many entrepreneurs use social media, especially for product marketing.

Effectively communicating work to employees is a difficult task for leaders (Ayub et. al. 2014). According to research by Hargie (2016), good communication in an organization can optimize work relationships, encourage creativity, and increase employees' sense of belonging and commitment to the organization. The owner of Farizka Fashion, during the Covid-19 pandemic, relied on social media to communicate with production actors and communicate with marketing actors. Meanwhile, social media helps communication between traders and consumers, traders can provide product information to consumers, and consumers become more loyal to the traders and brands they sell (Wahyono et. al. 2017).

It has been previously mentioned that Farizka Fashion also does online marketing through Shopee, Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp. In 2020, Farizka Fashion will centralize online communication, especially through WhatsApp.

Communication via WhatsApp is not only for marketing purposes, but also forms a social network.

WhatsApp is an internet-based application that has the potential to be used as a communication media (Rahartri 2019). In Fattah's study, WhatsApp had a significant effect on students' writing skills and increased students' active participation in class (Fattah 2015). Rahartri's research shows that users prefer to use WhatsApp as a communication media compared to other communication media (Rahartri 2019). Meanwhile, Trisnani's research resulted in findings that the communication media often used by community leaders was WhatsApp (Trisnani 2017).

WhatsApp has several advantages over similar applications. Several advantages of WhatsApp are that it does not require a password, is directly connected to a contact number on the cellphone, is practical and timely for sending messages, is easy to understand, and saves battery and saves internet data (Rahartri 2019). Many parties use WhatsApp as a media to communicate online.

Based on Kumar and Sharma's research in Northern India, WhatsApp is a media for chatting and exchanging information that can make users establish intimacy with friends and relatives (Kumar and Sharma 2016). Although WhatsApp is not an official forum because it tends to be informal (Subekti and Toni 2021), WhatsApp groups are used as a medium to convey information, discuss, and entertain (Sukrillah et. al. 2017; Nurdiarti 2018). During the Covid-19 pandemic, many employees used WhatsApp Group to send chat and make video calls (Komalasari 2020).

However, the use of social media is also not without constraints. For example, SMEs in Nairobi have not fully utilized social media for business, due to limited technical and infrastructure capabilities (Jagongo and Kinyua 2013). The use of social media Facebook and Instagram to promote Farizka Fashion is not optimal because the owner is overwhelmed in managing these social media accounts.

Currently, Farizka Fashion mostly uses WhatsApp both for communication and promotion. For the sake of smooth running of business, Farizka Fashion focuses more on the social networks that have been formed. The social network in question is a social network among production actors and a social network among marketing actors, especially market traders and resellers who make repeat orders.

This research uses social network theory. For network theory, actors may be individuals, but may also be groups, companies, and communities (Ritzer and

Goodman 2005). According to Giusta (in Casson 2012), the success of an entrepreneurship depends on access to social networks that provide information and trust. An information network is important in communicating information, controlling conflict, and encouraging cooperation (Casson 2012). In this research, the theory of social networks is used to analyze the social relationships that occur among the Farizka Fashion jeans convection business actors both in the production and marketing.

The production of jeans and marketing of jeans products by Farizka Fashion are supported by the existence of a social network. Social networks are supported by good communication. During the Covid-19 pandemic, all businesses encountered problems, especially small businesses such as Farizka Fashion. That's why Farizka Fashion relies on WhatsApp as a media to communicate with production actors and marketing actors. If communication is well-established, of course it can strengthen social networks. This will help the smooth running of the business run by Farizka Fashion.

Compared with several other scientific studies, this research seeks to discuss communication on small business social networks using a sociological point of view. This research aims to examine the benefits of WhatsApp as a communication media on the social network of the Farizka Fashion jeans convection business. This research uses social network theory and qualitative research methods with a case study strategy.

METHOD

This research was conducted at the Farizka Fashion jeans convection business which is located in Wonopringgo District, Pekalongan Regency, Central Java Province, Indonesia. Research on the benefits of WhatsApp as a communication media on the social network of the Farizka Fashion jeans convection business was specifically carried out from January to December 2020. This research used a qualitative research method with a case study strategy. When the Covid-19 pandemic hit Indonesia, field research was carried out by following the health protocol recommended by the government.

The informants in this research were determined based on purposive sampling technique. Research informants are consisted of into key informant, main informants, and supporting informant. Key informant in this research is the owner

of the Farizka Fashion jeans convection business, or usually called the boss. Main informants consisted of eight production actors and two marketing actors. Then the supporting informant is Farizka Fashion owner's mother. The supporting informant has a lot of information about Farizka Fashion even though she is not directly involved in the production or marketing process. So that, the number of informants in this research were twelve people.

Primary data collection was obtained through non-participant observation and in-depth interviews. Meanwhile, secondary data was obtained through documentation. Research documentation from books, scientific journals, and other literature related to this research. Triangulation of data sources was used as a technique to test the validity of the data.

The data analysis technique used in this research was the interactive model data analysis technique by Miles and Huberman (1999). Data analysis starts from 1) collecting field data through observation techniques, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Then 2) data reduction by providing codes on the results of observations, interview transcripts, and documentation results, then selecting and sorting the data as needed. 3) Presentation of data in the form of narrative text and table according to research categories. 4) Conclusion or verification.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Farizka Fashion jeans convection business

Farizka Fashion was founded in 2014 by an entrepreneur born in Wonopringgo. Jeans products produced by Farizka Fashion are clothes made from denim. Farizka Fashion jeans convection business is still a small business or home industry that does not have a business license. Farizka Fashion only relies on business capital from personal savings and financial support from family. This small business does not receive business capital support from the government and does not borrow capital from financial institutions.

In the production sector, Farizka Fashion business actors include the owner of a jeans convection or who is commonly called 'the boss' and several foremen. These foremen include pattern fitter, embroiderer, tailor, washermen, ironing men, and finishing worker. Each foreman has several more employees. The boss maintains an intense communication relationship with the foremen. The boss also hires transporters and production assistant. Transporters are in charge of transporting jeans products from one foreman to another.

In the marketing sector, the parties who act as marketing actors for jeans products are the owner of the convection business, production assistant, resellers, and of course market traders. At the first time, the boss was offering jeans products to market traders and accepting orders for jeans from the market traders. After the marketing network was formed and there were regular customers, the task of offering jeans products to market traders was transferred to production assistant. The boss only occasionally visited the market. Resellers of Farizka Fashion products are friends or acquaintances of the boss, students who want to trade, and consumers of Farizka Fashion themselves. Meanwhile, market traders are the main buyers of Farizka Fashion products. Loyal market traders also help promote Farizka Fashion jeans convection business to other market traders.

Farizka Fashion's use of WhatsApp

Initially, Farizka Fashion relied more on face-to-face communication rather than online communication. The boss usually checks the work progress of the foremen. The boss came to the foremen's workplace almost every day. The meetings that took place almost every day made the relationship between them intimate. The communication between them is not only about work, but also about daily life.

Apart from communicating face-to-face, online communication is also well established by Farizka Fashion. Since before the Covid-19 pandemic, the boss has used WhatsApp to communicate. The production actors of Farizka Fashion are also part of a WhatsApp group. Initially the Farizka Fashion's WhatsApp group was founded in January 2020 under the name Farizka Family. The WhatsApp group was mainly used to discuss work, namely the production of jeans. WhatsApp groups are also used to talk about everyday life.

The benefits of the WhatsApp group are increasingly felt, especially in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic which requires everyone to do physical distancing. However, because the WhatsApp group Farizka Family, which was created in early 2020, had too many members, communication became out of control. Conversations about the production process overlap with private conversations between members. Therefore, the boss decided to delete the

WhatsApp group in early July 2020. Then on July 20, 2020, the boss created another WhatsApp group with the same name, namely Farizka Family.

The WhatsApp group Farizka Family, which was created in July 2020, only has ten members with the boss as the group admin. Farizka Family WhatsApp group members are foremen who work with the boss, production assistant, and transporters. They are the main actors in the jeans production process carried out by Farizka Fashion.

Communication in WhatsApp groups is mainly communication about work. For example, the finishing worker informs the boss that the buttons are out of stock, or the tailor tells that the jeans are finished sewing, and so on. Information about work if through WhatsApp chat privately will bring up more communication channels. Therefore, the Farizka Family WhatsApp group was created so that all matters related to work are conveyed. Apart from work, WhatsApp groups are also used for social purposes. For example, notifications when there are group members who hold events such as weddings, celebrate the birth of a baby, and so on.

Apart from WhatsApp groups, personal WhatsApp chats are also being carried out. If WhatsApp groups are used to discuss work and social events, personal WhatsApp chats are intended for more personal communication. For example, if there is a member of the Farizka Family WhatsApp group who wants to borrow money from the boss, then it is conveyed via direct chat to the boss.

Even in the marketing sector, the boss also uses WhatsApp to promote jeans products. As the owner of Farizka Fashion, the boss posts lots of pictures of the latest jeans products via WhatsApp status. Figure 1 shows an example of a WhatsApp status update from the Farizka Fashion jeans convection business.

Figure 1

WhatsApp status of Farizka Fashion for online marketing of jeans products



Source: Data from Farizka Fashion's WhatsApp status screenshot, 2020

Figure 1 shows the WhatsApp status of Farizka Fashion. The product photo offered is a woman's trouser product, complete with the product name and product description such as material and size. If a market traders or resellers are interested in the products offered, they can immediately place an order via WhatsApp.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, market demand for jeans products produced by Farizka Fashion experienced a decline. The boss no longer visits the market to offer products in person. The boss is trying to promote the product through WhatsApp status. During the Covid-19 pandemic, orders for jeans products continued but turnover decreased a bit than before the pandemic period.

Benefits of WhatsApp as a communication media on the Farizka Fashion social network

The social network among the production actors and the social network among the marketing actors of the Farizka Fashion jeans convection business are supported by communication. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, the most dominant communication was face-to-face communication. During the Covid-19 pandemic, communication that was more dominant was online communication. Farizka Fashion uses WhatsApp as an online communication media.

Thanks to WhatsApp, communication problems during the Covid-19 pandemic can be resolved. Smooth communication certainly affects social networks both in the production and marketing aspects. A good social network can be a strong foundation for the smooth running of the Farizka Fashion jeans convection business. However, online communication also has its own problems. Based on the research that has been done, we summarize the benefits and constraints of WhatsApp as a communication media on the Farizka Fashion social network into table 1.

Tabel 1

**The benefits and constraints of WhatsApp as a communication media on the
Farizka Fashion social network**

	Social network of production	Social network of marketing
WhatsApp benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overcoming the limitations of face-to-face communication between production actors due to the Covid-19 pandemic - WhatsApp group Farizka Family was used to communicate about the work or production process of jeans as well as social relations among production actors - WhatsApp chat privately is used to talk about personal issues 	<p>Overcoming the limitations of face-to-face communication between marketing actors due to the Covid-19 pandemic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The owner of Farizka Fashion promoting the latest jeans product from Farizka Fashion via WhatsApp status - Market traders and resellers can order jeans products by contacting the owner of Farizka Fashion via WhatsApp
WhatsApp Constraints	Limited online communication due to loss of internet signal during extreme weather or power outages	Limited online communication due to loss of internet signal during extreme weather or power outages

Source: Research data, 2020

Based on table 1, WhatsApp is useful as a communication media on social network of production and social network of marketing. But online communication certainly has its limitations. For example, when the weather is extreme, such as heavy rain or when the power outages, online communication will be constraints by the loss of internet signal.

Farizka Fashion jeans convection business is classified as a small business with internal capital. The production and marketing processes of Farizka Fashion products are supported by social network of production and social network of marketing. These social networks are strengthened by good communication.

Communication consists of face-to-face communication and online communication. Face-to-face communication, that is, the boss meets directly with

the production actors and the marketing actors. During the Covid-19 pandemic like today, face-to-face communication is increasingly difficult because of the imposition of physical distancing, WFH, and the existence of strict health protocols. However, with advances in technology, communication can be done online. Farizka Fashion uses WhatsApp as a communication media to communicate with production actors and marketing actors.

Social network theory is used to discuss the benefits of WhatsApp as a communication media on the social network for the Farizka Fashion jeans convection business. As explained by Ritzer and Goodman (2005), actors from the social network Farizka Fashion are individuals involved in the production process (the boss, the foremen, transporters, and production assistant) and individuals involved in the marketing process (the boss, production assistant, reseller, and market trader), as well as Farizka Fashion itself as a group or organization that is a home industry. The results of this study are also consistent with Casson (2012), in which WhatsApp is used as a communication media by Farizka Fashion to share information, build social relationships, and establish business partnerships.

The results of this study are similar to the results of Kusumastuti's (2020) study that the Covid-19 pandemic reduced the productivity of Farizka Fashion due to decreased market demand. The Covid-19 pandemic has also caused obstacles in the field of communication. Communication, which is usually done face-to-face, is now done online with the help of technology. Online communication can be done through social media.

According to several scientific studies, social media has a positive impact on its users. Social media as a communication media is useful to optimizing social relationships (Kumar and Sharma 2016; Putri and Irwansyah 2020), optimizing work relationships (Hargie 2016; Wahyono et. al. 2017; Zafar et. al. 2017; Rahartri 2019), to improve entrepreneurship (Rahayu and Laela 2018), and to promote products (Zafar, et. al. 2017; Olanrewaju 2020).

One of the most widely used social media is WhatsApp. WhatsApp is used by various groups, from students (Fattah 2015), library visitors (Rahartri 2019), community leaders (Trisnani 2017), to employees (Komalasari 2020). Farizka Fashion also uses WhatsApp as a communication media.

However, just like Jagongo and Kinyua's research (2013), the use of social media by Farizka Fashion for business purposes also encountered constraints. The constraints experienced by Farizka Fashion when using WhatsApp as a social media to communicate, namely when the weather is extreme or when the power goes out, then the internet signal is lost. Of course this interrupted communication when doing business.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research and analysis that has been carried out, the conclusion of this research is that WhatsApp is useful as a communication media on the social network of the Farizka Fashion jeans convection business. In the production sector, the benefit of WhatsApp is as a medium for communicating online. WhatsApp group Farizka Family is used to communicate about work and build a social relation among production actors. Meanwhile, WhatsApp chat in private is used to communicate about personal matters.

In the marketing sector, the boss uses WhatsApp status to promote the latest jeans product from Farizka Fashion. WhatsApp is also used as a media of communication between marketing actors. For example, to communicate about jeans product orders, jeans product delivery, and so on.

Apart from these benefits, the use of WhatsApp as an online communication media has also encountered constraints. The problem is the limited online communication due to lost internet signal during extreme weather or due to power outages. If the internet signal is lost, online communication will be interrupted. The disruption of communication will certainly have a negative effect on the social network of production and the social network of marketing of the Farizka Fashion jeans convection business..

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