

## The Use of WhatsApp Business as an Online Marketing Communication Media for Beauty Brands During the Covid-19 Pandemic in Indonesia

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**Abstract.** The pandemic of Covid-19 has an impact on all aspects of human life and changed human lifestyles around the world, including Indonesia. The economy is of course one of the sectors affected by this pandemic. Companies must be creative and use various strategies in order to survive. Especially for companies that do not produce non primary products such as beauty products. Large companies that have survived for decades with beauty products that are well known and also have offline stores in various cities was not an exception. One of the effort taken is to reduce the cost of marketing communication which maximizes the online platform. This research was conducted to determine the use of online marketing communication (OMC) media by beauty brands during the Covid-19 pandemic, the OMC media referred in this research are WhatsApp Business. Conducted using descriptive method, through observations and interview to customer of beauty brands that have been operating for decades and also have an established brand. Results of this research showed that the advantages of using OMC is to maintain the existence of their brands and increase revenue, these large and well-established companies choose WhatsApp Business as the OMC media which are usually used by companies that are relatively new or not really popular. Based on customers' experience, the existence of WhatsApp Business is very helpful in order to obtain what they need, including beauty products, especially during pandemic, so customers don't have to leave their home, they only need to use their smartphone, shopping is now as easy as sending message. Research's conclusion, the selection of WhatsApp Business as one of the OMC media by various beauty brands is not stupid at all and also reasonable. This research is expected to provide input and evaluation for non-primary products or brands that are closely related to lifestyle in order to increase revenue and maintain engagement with customers during the pandemic, online and low cost.

### Introduction

March 31, 2020, Indonesian Government issued Government Regulation Number 21 of 2020. This regulation contains details regarding the technical implementation of Large-Scale Social Restrictions (*Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar* – PSBB) in the context of accelerating handling of Corona Virus Disease 2019 (Covid-19) in Indonesia. Large-Scale Social Restrictions are restrictions on certain activities of residents in an area suspected of being infected with the Covid-19 in such a way as to prevent its possible spread, consisting of: (a) The learning and teaching process and working from home; (b) Restrictions on religious activities; (c) Restrictions on activities in public places or facilities; (d) Restrictions of social and cultural activities; (e) Restrictions on modes of transportation; and (f)

Other activity restrictions specifically related to defence and security aspects [1]. Here are some areas in Indonesia that apply Large-Scale Social Restrictions on April 2020: Jakarta, Bandung, Depok, Bogor, Bekasi, Tangerang, and Pekanbaru.

Restrictions on activities in public places cause shops and malls to be closed, except for those selling food, beverages, and foodstuffs or primary needs. So what about products that are more related to lifestyle or non-essential needs? Such as beauty products? Because during pandemic, people tend to focus on fulfil their primary needs. According to Lexico, beauty products is any product, especially a cream or lotion, intended to improve a person's appearance; frequently in plural [2]. Beauty products also known as cosmetics, composite term for a variety of camouflages applied to the skin, lips, hair, and nails for purposes of beautifying in accordance with cultural dictates [3]. The beauty industry is one of the sectors that is affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Sales of beauty products, especially make-up have experienced a sharp decline, as many people work from home and advised to stay at home during the pandemic. People also tend to use light make-up, because they have to use mask [4].

Companies that produce beauty products must be creative and use various strategies in order to survive and avoid crisis. Especially those which relies more on offline sales (stores and malls). What are they supposed to do when their offline stores in various cities have to close? Of course they maximize the online sales. Even after malls are re-opened, sales of beauty products did not immediately return to normal, because many people were still careful about doing activities outside the house.

Maximizes the use of online platform is also as the effort taken to reduce the cost of marketing communication. Website and marketplaces is a commonplace and was practiced before the pandemic. There is also online platform that researcher found, started to be used intensively by various beauty brands during the pandemic. The online media referred in this research are WhatsApp Business. WhatsApp is currently one of the most popular application worldwide, and allows its users to communicate via text/voice messages, photos and videos. The need for only a mobile Internet connection, with no extra cost for sharing unlimited information, makes it a useful platform for social interaction [5].

During the pandemic, researcher found that some large companies that have survived for decades with well-established beauty brands began to use WhatsApp Business as online marketing communication (OMC) media which are usually used by beauty brands that are relatively new or not really popular. According to EnuSambyal and Kaur, OMC has dual purpose: (a) OMC used to strengthen the firm's brand by informing the customer about the features of the products; (b) OMC provides sales by directly encouraging the product to buy the product sooner or later [6].

Researcher find it difficult to find previous research related to the use of WhatsApp as an online marketing communication (OMC) media during pandemic. Many research that has been done regarding WhatsApp during pandemic has mainly discussed the use of WhatsApp as a communication media in the education and health or medical sectors.

One of the most relevant previous studies that researcher can find is the research conducted by Boedi Priantoro, entitled "Marketing Communication Strategy Through WhatsApp Media (Case Study Garuda Indonesia Solo)" published on the 5th National Scholarship Seminar 2019, Book 2: Social and Humanities. This research aimed to find out the marketing communication strategy by utilizing WhatsApp media by the Sales and Marketing of Garuda Indonesia Solo through the DAMO approach (Discovery, Adventure, Momentum, and Outlook) in conveying product promotional messages visually so that they can be conveyed to the public [7]. The difference with the research conducted is the approach used, where the researcher used 4Cs to replace the 4Ps of the marketing mix.

D. Jakhar, S. Kaul, and I. Kaur conducted research entitled "WhatsApp Messenger as A Teledermatology Tool During Coronavirus Disease (Covid-19): From Bedside to Phone-Side". This research was published on CED (Clinical and Experimental Dermatology) Volume 45, Issue 6, August 2020, page 739-740. Because this research discussed about how Covid-19 has forced the shutdown of many nonessential services in most high-risk countries. Most dermatology consultations (except emergencies) have been deferred as a precautionary measure to prevent the spread of Covid-19. While clinicians want to help, a solution may be offered in the form of teledermatology using everyday tools/devices. This research exploring WhatsApp as a potential telecommunication tool in medicine. In

these times of Covid-19 and the need for social distancing, not many dermatologists are familiar with teledermatology, and WhatsApp can serve as an interface between patients and dermatologists [5].

The researcher argues that if dermatology consultations can be done remotely using WhatsApp, it is interesting to research about the process of selling and purchasing beauty products which related to dermatology through WhatsApp Business. This research was conducted to determine changes in the online marketing communication (OMC) media used by beauty products during the Covid-19 pandemic. How they started using WhatsApp which was originally a more personal online communication media. Researcher describe the use of WhatsApp Business as online marketing communication (OMC) media for beauty products during the Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia with 2 (two) sub-focuses: advantages and costumer experiences. Because these two things can be used as input for the related beauty brands as well as for other brands that are currently or new on using WhatsApp Business.

## **Method**

This research was conducted with a qualitative approach. Denzin and Lincoln [8] claim that qualitative research involves an interpretive and naturalistic approach, “this means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them”. To achieve the research objectives in of WhatsApp Business as an online marketing communication media for beauty products during the Covid-19 Pandemic in Indonesia, the most appropriate method for this research is descriptive study. This because, researcher analysed the data descriptively and the presentation of the result was in the form of an explanation words. Suryana [9] affirms that descriptive method is focused to make description systematically and accurately based on facts of certain objects.

The data collection techniques in this research are: literature study, online data search, participant observation (offline and online), interviews, and documentation. Due to the pandemic, the resources of the companies which is the object of this research are difficult to reach and not able to be interviewed, so researcher prioritize offline and online observations, as primary data sources, rather than interviews. Therefore, purposive sampling technique used to determine the informant, which is a data source sampling technique with certain considerations" [10]. The informant of this research consisted of female customer who has experienced on purchasing beauty products through WhatsApp Business during this pandemic in several times. Thus, she met the criteria to be interviewed for having experience purchasing beauty products through WhatsApp Business during this pandemic, more than once

To analyse data of this research, Miles and Huberman [11] suggested that activities in qualitative data analysis were carried out interactively and continuously until complete, so that the data was saturated, consisting of: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (verification).

## **Results and Discussion**

### **1.1. Results**

During pandemic, people tend to focus on fulfil their primary needs. The beauty industry is one of the sectors that is affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Sales of beauty products, especially make-up have experienced a sharp decline, as many people work from home and advised to stay at home during the pandemic. People also tend to use light makeup, because they have to use mask. Companies that produce beauty products must be creative and use various strategies in order to survive and avoid crisis. During the pandemic, researcher found that some large companies that have survived for decades with well-established beauty brands began to use WhatsApp Business as online marketing

communication (OMC) media which are usually used by beauty brands that are relatively new or not really popular.

Table 1 lists some of the beauty brands which from UK, America, and Asia (including Indonesia) which circulating and used by Indonesian customers, that researcher have noticed using WhatsApp Business.

**Table 1.** Some of Beauty Brands Circulating in Indonesia that Use WhatsApp Business as an Online Marketing Communication Media

<b>Brand</b>	<b>Year of Establishment</b>	<b>Headquarter</b>
Revlon	1932	New York, USA
Estee Lauder	1946	New York, USA
Ultima II	1959	New York, USA
Sulhwasoo	1966	Seoul, South Korea
Clinique	1968	New York, USA
Mustika Ratu	1975	Jakarta, Indonesia
The Body Shop	1976	London, UK
MAC	1984	Toronto, Canada
Bobbi Brown	1991	New York, USA
Laneige	1994	Seoul, South Korea
Wardah	1995	Indonesia
Sensatia Botanicals	2000	Bali, Indonesia
Nature Republic	2009	Seoul, South Korea
The Saem	2010	Seoul, South Korea

Beauty brands on the Table 1 has offline stores in various cities in Indonesia. Some of these beauty brands was just started using WhatsApp Business during the pandemic. They choose WhatsApp Business as part of their online marketing communication (OMC) media rather than mass media or another conventional media. WhatsApp first appeared on February 24, 2009 as a compatible application for iOS and Android. Since its inception, WhatsApp has been continuously updating by adding new features that make it easier for its users. The following are journey and development of WhatsApp features over the past eleven years [12]:

a. Share Images and Videos

When it started operating in 2009, WhatsApp presented a feature that allowed its users to share images and videos. In the following year, to be precise in June 2010, WhatsApp then improved its video sharing feature.

b. Location Sharing

Apart from improving the video sharing feature, in 2010 WhatsApp also introduced a feature called sharing location. Through this feature, users can tell their location to anyone on WhatsApp.

c. Group Features

In February 2011, the group chat feature was presented by WhatsApp. Since the appearance of this group feature, WhatsApp has been increasingly used by people around the world. At that time, it reached 1 billion messages sent in one day by its users.

d. Voicemail

In August 2013, WhatsApp introduced voicemail. After the presence of this feature, in the following year WhatsApp was at the top with 500 million users. In October 2014, Facebook officially acquired WhatsApp for US \$19 billion or the equivalent of 265 trillion rupiahs.

e. Read Receipts

Still in 2014, in November, WhatsApp debuted a receipt for those who read messages. Then two years later, the end-to-end encryption system was introduced by WhatsApp in February 2016.

f. WhatsApp Web

A big change happened after WhatsApp collaborated with Facebook. One of which is WhatsApp Web, which makes it easier for users to use the WhatsApp application in a personal computer or laptop by accessing [web.whatsapp.com](http://web.whatsapp.com).

g. Video Calls and Status

In 2016, WhatsApp users can chat face-to-face through WhatsApp Video Call feature. The following year, WhatsApp introduced status feature that resembled the Instagram Stories feature. Users can upload images or videos to WhatsApp Status and can only last for 24 hours.

h. Document-Sharing

Mar 2, 2016, WhatsApp introduces its document-sharing feature, initially allowing users to share PDF files with their contacts.

i. WhatsApp Business

In 2018, WhatsApp launched an application called WhatsApp Business which is a separate application from the regular WhatsApp application. The displayed profile is a business profile, starting from the address, contact and other descriptions.

j. Stickers

On October 25, 2018, WhatsApp announced support for Stickers. But unlike other platforms WhatsApp requires third party apps to add Stickers to WhatsApp.

k. Dark Mode

In early 2020, WhatsApp launched its "dark mode" for iPhone and Android devices – a new design consisting of a darker palette.

l. Mute Chat

In October 2020, WhatsApp has rolled out a feature that allow users to mute both individuals and group chats forever. The mute chat settings now show '8 hours', '1 week', and 'Always' options. The 'Always' option replaces the '1 year' option that was originally part of the settings. This new feature is present on both iOS and Android devices, as well as on WhatsApp web.

Actually there are many more features that WhatsApp presents every year, one of which is disabling notification feature so that the larger YouTube display can be enjoyed in the chat box.

As mentioned earlier, that in this research, researcher used advantages and costumer experiences of WhatsApp Business as an online marketing communication media for beauty brands during the Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia based on the results of research that has been done.

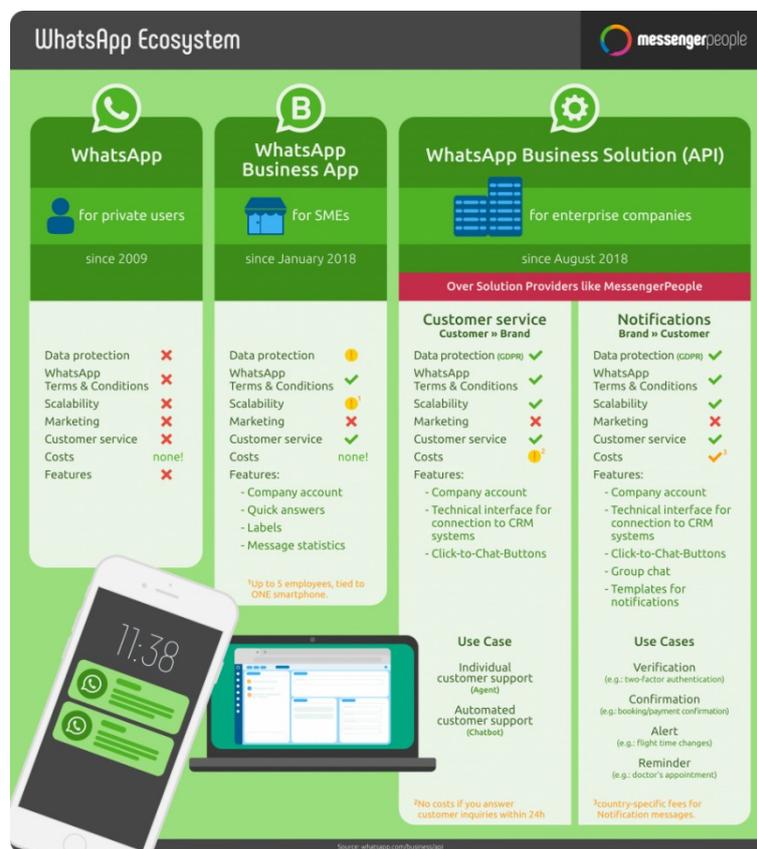
**a. Advantages of WhatsApp Business as an Online Marketing Communication Media for Beauty Products During the Covid-19 Pandemic in Indonesia**

Talking about the advantages of WhatsApp Business, inseparable from its features. In the previous section, researcher have explained the features of WhatsApp Messenger for private users. Research observations showed that WhatsApp Business is now divided into two, WhatsApp Business and WhatsApp Business Solution API. What distinguishes between the two? Of course in its features, which also different compare to the WhatsApp Messenger for private users.

In their official website, WhatsApp explained that WhatsApp Business is free to download and was built with the small business owner in mind. The app makes it easy to personally connect with customers, highlight products and services, and answer their questions throughout their shopping experience. Create a catalogue to showcase products and services and use special tools to automate, sort and quickly respond to messages [13]. Franz Buchenberger the CEO and founder of MessengerPeople said that "WhatsApp for Business shows that WhatsApp is now serious about supporting businesses. The app that is already used by more than one billion users, will also allow millions of small business owners to benefit from its features" [14].

WhatsApp Business Solution API is for medium and large businesses, it powers communication with customers all over the world, connect with them on WhatsApp in a simple, secure, and reliable way [15]. Birgit Bucher give one important point about WhatsApp Business API that distinguishes between two business functionalities: customer service and notifications. (a) Customer Service: WhatsApp chat with customers is free of charge. The company can respond to the customer within the 24-hour window after a customer sends a chat message; (b) Notifications: After the 24-hour window has passed, companies must pay to message users, and can only send messages under certain conditions [16]. Birgit Bucher also said in the other article that WhatsApp Business API is a win-win-win situation for everyone involved: more services for customers, professional opportunity for companies, and a first, sustainable revenue model for WhatsApp [17].

Research observation showed that Revlon, Estee Lauder, Ultima II, Clinique, MAC, Bobbi Brown, Sulhwasoo, Laneige, Nature Republic, The Saem, and Mustika Ratu using WhatsApp Business which is managed centrally at their headquarters. WhatsApp Business of Wardah managed separately for each city, while Sensatia Botanicals managed separately based on the location of the offline store. Figure 1 will clearly shows the differences in the features of the three types of WhatsApp, taken from the article by Katharina Kremming [18].



**Figure 1.** The Differences in the Features of WhatsApp for Private Users, WhatsApp Business App, and WhatsApp Business Solution API

Based on observations, researcher also found that Revlon, Estee Lauder, Ultima II, Clinique, MAC, and Bobbi Brown are some of the beauty brands which distributed in Indonesia by Tempo Scan Pacific. Customers of these brands are able to make online purchases through WhatsApp Business of each brand, but they also can place orders through WhatsApp of Tempo Scan Home Delivery (TSHD). Researcher confirmed that TSHD and The Body Shop are using the WhatsApp Business Solution API

as their online marketing communication media. This can be seen from verified WhatsApp Business contacts marked with a green check.

On their official website, Tempo Scan Pacific said that the Covid-19 pandemic has forced all of us to keep our distance and carry out various #StayatHome activities. However, this should not make it difficult for customers to get various quality products from Tempo Scan Group. TSHD is launch on May 2020 to help customers to purchase their favourite products from Tempo Scan Group using only a smartphone, through the official WhatsApp number of TSHD on the contact list [19]. Online observations showed that initially, only Ultima II could be ordered via TSHD, then TSHD added Revlon as a beauty brand that could be ordered via TSHD. And starting November 6, 2020, Estee Lauder, Clinique, MAC, and Bobbi Brown can also be ordered via TSHD.

#### **b. Customer Experiences on WhatsApp Business as an Online Marketing Communication Media for Beauty Products During the Covid-19 Pandemic in Indonesia**

During the research process, researcher had the opportunity to interview female customer who had purchased beauty products from Estee Lauder, Revlon, Bobbi Brown, and Sulwhasoo via WhatsApp Business during this pandemic. Melly Maulin Purwaningwulan (43) said that she knew the WhatsApp Business contacts of these brands from the official Instagram account of each brand. The customer experience in shopping through WhatsApp Business, researcher categorize it into 3 (three) aspects: response, delivery, and packaging. Where these three aspects can ultimately determine whether the customer will re-purchase and determine the image of the brand concerned.

According to Purwaningwulan, each brand gave a different response when contacted via WhatsApp Business, but the overall response was positive, especially when it came to order or purchasing. This was assessed by Purwaningwulan due to meeting the sales target. Meanwhile, when customer contacted WhatsApp Business for a consultation regarding skin care products or skin conditions, Estee Lauder and Revlon were considered to have given the most positive response. Unfortunately, Sulwhasoo is a little slow in responding the questions about their products. Researcher also experienced the same when contacted WhatsApp Business of Ultima II as the part of research observation. Researcher were disappointed because the response was delayed for a day, the administrator replied the next day, even though researcher contacted during operational hours. However, when the researcher tried to contact WhatsApp Business of Tempo Scan Home Delivery (TSHD), the response was fast and real-time.

Purwaningwulan also had positive experiences related to shipping, order was quickly delivered. Estee Lauder even provides information about the delivery receipt. In addition, Estee Lauder is also considered to provide the most memorable experience related to packaging. Products are sent with a good packaging using an exclusive box with some gifts. Meanwhile, other brands use standard packaging. Researcher also have experience in purchasing Ultima II products. Within 3 days, the product has been received, with packaging that ensures product safety, but standard appearance.

Response, delivery, and packaging, these three aspects can ultimately determine whether the customer will re-purchase and determine the image of the brand concerned. Overall, Purwaningwulan said that the use of WhatsApp Business by beauty brands really helped customer to shop from home during this pandemic. In addition, it can be a solution for companies to maintain product sales. Purwaningwulan emphasized that professional handling is needed even though the order is made (only) through WhatsApp Business. This especially related to complaints that did not being responded, even though the WhatsApp Business contact is still active and shared with Instagram followers. This means that good will of the brand is needed so that the brand image and trust can be maintained.

### **1.2. Discussion**

Saujanya Shrivastava, Group Chief Marketing Officer at MakeMyTrip said that “WhatsApp for businesses has enabled us to reach our customers quickly and effectively. This is a great example of how technology creates customer-centric experiences” [18].

During its development, WhatsApp has transformed from just an instant messenger (IM) to social media, especially with the appearance of the status feature. The selection of WhatsApp Business as

one of the online marketing communication media by various brands including beauty brands is not stupid at all, because of the following reasons:

- a. WhatsApp usage update on October 30, 2020, WhatsApp is now delivering roughly 100 billion messages a day;
- b. The latest messaging app usage statistics show that WhatsApp has 2.0 billion users worldwide. WhatsApp is the number one messaging app, closely followed by Facebook Messenger with 1.3 billion users and the Chinese messaging app WeChat with 1.2 billion users;
- c. WhatsApp is the most popular global mobile messenger apps as on July 2019, based on the number of monthly active users;
- d. There are only 25 countries in the world where WhatsApp is not the market leader. WhatsApp also number one in other countries in the Asia-Pacific (APAC) Region, including Indonesia;
- e. Not only the global usage numbers and WhatsApp penetration compared to other messaging apps worldwide show the immense value of the green messaging app, but also looking at the numbers of downloads (for iOS & Android)

After the launch of the free WhatsApp Business on 2018, WhatsApp become an extremely interesting platform for businesses with features which made it possible for small companies to reach out to their clients over the messaging app. The oldest bank in Brazil, Banco do Brasil, now allows its customer to withdraw money via WhatsApp. The customer sends a message to Banco do Brasil and names the amount of money they wish to withdraw (current limit is 300 Reals) [20].

The free WhatsApp Business is the (almost) perfect solution for small businesses which has maximum of 1-3 employees and the kind of business that don't take the issue of data protection too seriously. So, large companies with established brands just like beauty brands that have been discuss in this research are recommended to use the WhatsApp Business Solution API to be more professional.

## **Conclusion**

Beauty brands in Indonesia choose to use WhatsApp Business as one of their online marketing communication media rather than mass media or another conventional media because WhatsApp Business has many advantages: first, its features which seriously supporting businesses and second, its reduce the cost of marketing communication. As we may know WhatsApp Business are free of charge while WhatsApp Business API need a cost but adjustable to the company's budget. Based on customers' experience, the existence of WhatsApp Business is very helpful in order to obtain what they need, including beauty products, especially during pandemic, so customers don't have to leave their home, they only need to use their smartphone, shopping is now as easy as sending message. However, businesses in general not only beauty brands, should manage their WhatsApp Business (App or API) properly and correctly. One of the most basic things is related to the response during operational hours, don't just rely on quick reply, because by using WhatsApp Business, customer will expect to get a faster or real-time response. In short, using and managing WhatsApp Business in a professional manner to achieve the goals of online marketing communication which is strengthen the firm's brand by informing the customer about the features of the products and also provides sales by directly encouraging the product to buy the product sooner or later.

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