

# Women MSMEs and Covid-19: Social Media Marketing as a Survival Strategy

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**Abstract:-** This study aims to explore the social media marketing (SMM) strategy deployed by women-owned MSMEs in Indonesia during the Covid-19 pandemic. Data of 125 women micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) as members of one women entrepreneur association were collected and analysed through statistic descriptive. Semi-structured interviews with 10 women MSMEs were conducted to explore deeper their SMM strategy during the crisis. The findings reveal that women MSMEs implement extensive SMM strategies that include posting and sharing attractive contents, word-of-mouth, follow-for-follow, paid influencers and native ads, as well as evaluation. The insights from this study may help women MSMEs, government, and policymakers to survive the Covid-19 pandemic and revive the economy.

**Keywords:-** Entrepreneurship; social media marketing; pandemic; Covid-19; women MSME.

## I. BACKGROUND

The 2019 coronavirus disease (Covid-19) has imperilled global health [1] and economy [2]. Nations around the world adopt various policies to decelerate the outbreak. This involves social distancing and lockdown approaches [2]. Although they may limit the transmission, the strategy also exacerbates economic affairs [3]. In the Indonesian context, the government restricts people's mobility in highly infected places. Nevertheless, the policy is lenient [4]. This is because the government encounters unfavourable trade-offs between improving public health and ameliorating economy. As a result of this, the confirmed cases have reached more than one million in January 2021 [5] and the national economy has been aggravating [4]. The government resolves neither the pandemic nor the financial crisis.

In Indonesia, 99,9% of business entities are micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) [6]. From the figure, women operate 43% of them [7]. Despite the significance, research has proven that women MSMEs are predominantly informal and smaller than their men-owned counterparts [8]. This fact is also true for Indonesia. In addition to that, women entrepreneurs face more constraints than men [9], [10]. The women's responsibility as mothers and housewives prevents them from expanding and improving their entrepreneurship [8], [11]. At an

institutional level, entrepreneurship policies champion men-dominated industry [12]. As such, funding and support for women entrepreneurship are limited [10], [13], [14]. In the event of a pandemic, such unfavourable condition compounds [15], [16]. It also should be noted that women entrepreneurs in developing countries encounter more hindrances than their demography in developed nations. The virus outbreak forces them to discontinue their ventures [11]. Because of this, there is an exigency to study women MSMEs during the pandemic, particularly those in a developing country such as Indonesia. The revelation of their strategy may help their peers and the government to reinvigorate the economic downturn.

Sultan & Sultan [3] have discussed how women strategise their MSMEs during the Covid-19 pandemic in Palestine. They discovered that one of the schemes is to deploy social media marketing (SMM). This is reasonable as SMM is cost-efficient and effective to reach a wide audience. The study of Ainin *et al.* [17] also evinces that SMM can offer both financial and non-financial benefits for SMEs (e.g., lowering customer service and marketing expenditures as well as enhancement of customer relationship). Other studies further confirm that SMM can enhance sales and number of customers [18], [19]. Although the discussion of Sultan & Sultan [3] provides beneficial insights for women MSMEs in times of crisis, it still requires further exploration. Particularly, there is a need to unveil the specific social media being utilised and how exactly women implement the SMM strategy.

This study aims to explore the SMM strategy deployed by women-owned MSMEs in Indonesia during the Covid-19 pandemic. This study offers four contributions. First, the analysis enriches the scarce women entrepreneurship literature during the endemic. Second, the exploration extends the work of Sultan and Sultan [3] by inspecting the particular SMM strategy adopted by women MSMEs during the pandemic. Third, in the practical viewpoint, women entrepreneurs may implement the insights from this study to improve their businesses performance. Fourth, because women entrepreneurship is consequential for economic advancement [8]–[10], this research may help policymakers and governmental bodies to diminish the negative economic effects induced by the corona outbreak.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Women MSMEs

This study refers to the theory of entrepreneurship to discuss MSMEs. Entrepreneurs start, own, and manage product, service, or market businesses (e.g., startups and SMEs) with the application of innovation and risk-taking [20]. Entrepreneurship accentuates the process of creating innovation that eventually promotes supplemental and original contributions to society [21]. Particularly, such creation nurtures healthy business competition [22], reduces unemployment, and improves the economy [23]. These effects further signify that entrepreneurship is vital for continuous development of contemporary market economies [22]. MSMEs involve all the characteristics of entrepreneurship. They create businesses and innovation which lead to economic enhancement.

In the case of gender, research has evidenced that women entrepreneurship differs from its men counterparts. The professional world offers limited employment options for women [23]. Even if they work in organisations, women often experience gender inequality and glass ceiling [24], [25]. Marriage and childcare [25] that cause difficulties in maintaining work and life balance [10] also often block their career development. There is also the factor of a need to accommodate caring responsibilities for their family [23]. Women start a business because they encounter those adverse realities, as opposed to men where the motivation is an entrepreneurial intention [26]. Further, operating a business is more arduous for women. Entrepreneurship policies are prone to prioritise male-dominated industry and masculine culture [12]. As a result, men's entrepreneurial networks rarely invite women [9] and there is less access to external funding for women entrepreneurs [27]. Despite the challenges, there are still women succeeding in their entrepreneurship. These women are keen to take actions to manage their businesses [28]. They implement strategies for marketing, human resources, as well as research and development to compensate for their lack of management skills [29]. Their self-confidence grows over time as they accumulate business experiences [30]. Additionally, given that quality connection with customers and substantial networks are key factors for women's entrepreneurship success [28], women entrepreneurs turn to supportive women's groups to build networks [9].

Women entrepreneurship in developing countries faces more constraints. Among 53 nations being surveyed by Mastercard [31], women entrepreneurs in developing countries experience gender bias more than in developed nations. These women primarily live in patriarchal societies and household responsibilities should be their priorities [8]. The women also lack resources and opportunities [13], [14]. Research in Vietnam evinces that limited funding and business expansion are the common barriers for women entrepreneurs in the country [10]. In Ethiopia, the inadequacy of training and experience in handling distribution channels and the unfamiliarity with technology cause problems for women entrepreneurs [32]. These facts

show that it requires extra efforts to achieve success for women entrepreneurs in developing countries.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, women entrepreneurs' suffering magnifies. A study from Canada reported that 60% of women entrepreneurs experience a 50% reduction in productivity due to the coronavirus outbreak [15]. The contributing factors for this are homeschooling and childcare responsibilities [16]. The condition exacerbates as women entrepreneurship often involves in the services industry and the virus outbreak destroys the sectors hardest [16]. In developing countries, such effects are much worse. Research from Bangladesh reveals that women entrepreneurs in the country need to shut their ventures or they have to carry additional financial burdens to continue their businesses [11].

### B. Social media marketing

SMM is a set of marketing strategy conveyed through one or more social media application [33]. This type of marketing generally aims to deliver brand-related information to the public and manage brands' connection with their customers [34]. Currently, there is a multitude of social media available. The big players in the game are Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, YouTube, Pinterest, LinkedIn, and TikTok. Due to its recent updates where users can post contents resembling Snapchat (i.e., story), apart from being an instant messaging application, WhatsApp is also actually a social media platform [35], [36]. There is no requirement to implement all those social media at once to attain SMM success. Each of the channels offers distinct cultures, architectures, and norms [37]. As such, each of them creates a unique context for marketing [38]. Consequently, the amounts of social media applied are insignificant. The primary task of marketers or brand owners to achieve SMM efficacy is to determine which social media application is relevant to their business goals.

The implementation of SMM offers multitudinous advantages for brands. The delivery of campaigns is more effective and efficient on social media [39] as it can reach a greater audience compared to conventional media such as TV and prints [40]. As a result, SMM can improve new connection with prospects and strengthen relationships with existing customers [41]. It also enables brands to influence consumers' trust [42] and purchase intention [43]. Through SMM, customers can assist the process of product advancement and market analysis [44] thus improving research and development. SMM further allows brands to be more cost-efficient in managing their activities. Specifically, they can reduce spending on customer service and marketing [17]. All in all, the core benefits of SMM exists in its ability to amplify sales and profit [18], [19], [45]. Because of such rationales, brands increasingly apply SMM in their marketing masterplan [46], [47].

Strategies in SMM can be free or paid. The former constitutes the principal activity in SMM which is content posting. Brands design the contents and share them both with their followers and non-followers. The contents comprise either a photo, video, link, text, or a combination

of them. For maximum outcomes, studies evidence that brands should share contents with entertainment, social, remuneration [48], interactivity [49], promotion, human resources, statement, charity, holiday, competition [33], and vividness [50]. Brands also should schedule their posts as timing affects social media performance [51]–[53]. If the contents on social media are stylised and formulaic, coupled with interesting or popular products or services being offered, the free strategy is also available in the form of word-of-mouth (WOM). In the WOM, regular people or influencers post the contents and review the brands they use or purchase. Studies signify the importance of WOM in SMM [54]–[56]. Virtanen et al. [57] also exhibit the efficacy of the follow-for-follow procedure. Brands can follow, like, and comment on targeted social media accounts expecting they will return the favour. Eventually, the activities will increase brands' followers. For the paid strategy, businesses can hire influencers to promote their brands. Research has proven the efficacy of it [58], [59]. The process of action typically begins through influencer identification. Then, it proceeds to negotiation. Once agreed, the influencer shares the contents mentioning the brands that pay them. Another method is to implement native ads. Each platform has its service such as Facebook with Facebook Ads, Instagram with Instagram Ads, Twitter with Twitter Ads, and TikTok with TikTok Ads. To apply the ads, brands pay the social media of choice. In exchange, the relevant platform displays the ads to predetermined users. The rate for the service can be as affordable as \$5 per day.

Brands generally deploy content engagement to gauge SMM success [52], [53], [60]. Content engagement is a metric to measure the interactions performed by users on social media [61]. The measurement typically comprises the number of likes, comments, shares, and other variables relevant to the platform [51]–[53], [62]. Brands can also include the metrics of customer acquisition and sales [45], [63]. The assessment compares the benefits received (e.g., number of likes or sales) with the efforts spent (e.g., time and cost). Brands should continuously monitor and evaluate their SMM strategy. If it is effective, they should maintain or improve it. If it fails, brands should substitute and experiment with a new method.

### *C. Social media marketing for women MSMEs during the Covid-19 pandemic*

The restriction in mobility and the fear of virus transmission hinder women's MSME to sell their products or services. Accordingly, their ventures decrease significantly in sales [11], [16]. Given that women MSMEs already lack resources in a normal situation [9], [10], they find it more difficult to receive funding to survive during the outbreak [11], [16]. As such, some of them need to halt their operation completely [11]. As a survival strategy, they should implement SMM. This is because, in the event of a pandemic, consumers purchase their needs and wants online [45]. The most effective method to reach them is via social media [3]. In addition to that, SMM is cost-efficient and can benefit small businesses such as enhancing customer base, sales, and other non-financial aspects [17], [18]. A study in Indonesia further sustains the notion [45]. The research

confirms that affordable paid Instagram Ads can improve the number of customers and sales during the pandemic. This suggests that such transformation to digital marketing and transaction may help the women to revive their entrepreneurship.

Despite the benefits, the outcome of SMM implementation for women MSMEs, in general, maybe inconsequential. There is evidence that SMEs are limited in time, knowledge, and vision to implement SMM effectively [64]. Even if they utilise SMM in their businesses, the application tends to exclude the purposeful agenda where the strategy could be added to customer experience [65]. There is also the absence of SMM evaluation in SMEs [66]. In the case of women entrepreneurs, they utilise a low level of entrepreneurial skills in their business activities [67] and possess limited resources [13], [14]. These women require guidance, human capital, and new skills to apply technology [16]. This study aims to fulfil these demands. It analysed how women implement SMM strategy in times of crisis such as now. The current exploration is imperative because there is extensive evidence that women entrepreneurship can contribute to driving economic growth [68]–[73]. The insights provided by this study may help policymakers and practitioners to assist women entrepreneurs to survive the Covid-19 pandemic and eventually revive the economy.

## III. RESEARCH METHODS

Sultan and Sultan [3] explored women MSMEs in Palestine. They deployed mixed-methods to investigate the challenges and opportunities encountered by women entrepreneurs in the country. This research resembles theirs to some extent. Therefore, this exploratory study implemented mixed-methods. The research argues that mixed-methods application allows a study to examine problems more profoundly [74]. Because the Covid-19 pandemic is a new phenomenon in the modern world and discussion on women MSMEs during the outbreak remains scarce, the quantitative and qualitative approach in this study could potentially unveil deep and insightful findings.

The government in Indonesia restricts people's movement to contain the spread of the coronavirus. As such, this study designed an online self-administered questionnaire to collect quantitative data. According to Sekaran and Bougie [74], the procedure bears some disadvantages. The response rate is low and participants might misunderstand the questionnaire contents and skip them. However, self-administered surveys are affordable, secure, and can reach targeted participants in a short time. Consequently, this approach is the most suitable for the current situation. For the qualitative part of the data, this study conducted semi-structured interviews with surviving women entrepreneurs during the pandemic.

Enterprise Size	Criteria	
	Assets (excluding land and building used for business operation)	Revenue (Yearly)
Micro	Maximum Rp50 millions	Maximum Rp300 million
Small	>Rp50 million to Rp500 million	>Rp300 million to Rp2.5 billions
Medium	>Rp500 million to Rp10 billions	>Rp2.5 billion to Rp50 billions
Large	>Rp10 billion	>Rp50billions

Table 1:- MSMEs Criteria in Indonesia

Source: Indonesian Regulation of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises No. 20/2008

The existing research explored women MSMEs in Indonesia. Table 1 shows the MSMEs criteria in the country. The participants in the study were women MSME owners who are the members of GAPEHAMM (Association of Food, Beverage, and Handicraft Entrepreneurs). The association consisted of 532 members (90% are women) residing in the province of South Sumatra. To reach the target respondents, this study created questionnaires using Google Form. The contents consisted of three parts. The first collected respondents' profiles. In this section, the questionnaires also asked the women entrepreneurs' perception of the impacts of the pandemic on their ventures. The answers might be useful to relate them with their SMM strategy. The second part attempted to confirm that women entrepreneurs indeed employed social media as a strategy during the Covid-19 pandemic. In the last part, the survey queried social media being used by women entrepreneurs.

Once the questionnaire was complete, one of the researchers sent the Google Form link to the GAPEHAMM WhatsApp group through its admin. The participation was voluntary and confidential. The admin informed the association members about the purpose of the data collection in the WhatsApp group. This activity occurred in November 2020. In total, this study managed to collect 130 raw data. The response rate was 24.4%, much lower than the study of Sultan and Sultan [3]. From the total response, the final data reduced to 125 due to incomplete answers. These data were analysed using statistic descriptive.

This study further conducted 10 in-depth semi-structured interviews to collect qualitative data. The respondents of this process were the surviving women entrepreneurs who participated in the prior quantitative data collection. The researchers attempted to interview participants from a different sector, age, and education level to capture representativeness. However, because women's tasks significantly magnify for homeschooling, childcare, and other household duties during the pandemic [11], [15], [16], numerous participants were unavailable for the interviews. The participants in the interviews were predominantly young and single women. The interview was conducted using phone calls and Zoom sessions. The conversation was recorded. Because one of the researchers is

a member of GAPEHAMM, rapport has been developed with the respondents before this study. Thus, the interviews were trouble-free. Further, equivalent to preceding studies discussing the influence of the Covid-19 pandemic on women entrepreneurship of Sultan and Sultan [3] and Jaim [11], this research adopted thematic analysis for the qualitative data interpretation. Such an approach is deemed appropriate for interpretative research and is widely accepted in the context of entrepreneurship [75]. In addition, because the context of Covid-19 is unique, the generation of codes was mostly through data-driven coding [76]. This study focused on the topic emphasised in the transcripts, especially the similarities and dissimilarities [77]. In the final stage, the procedure evolved three SMM strategy dimensions as follows: post and share, word-of-mouth, and paid strategy.

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

##### A. Survey data

The first part of the questionnaire queried respondents' profiles. Table 1 exhibits the complete results. The women entrepreneurs under study were mainly young, where 64.8% of them aged below 25 (n = 81), followed by 25 - 35 (n = 18), 36 - 45 (n = 17), and above 45 (n = 9). Connected to the age range, the majority of business owners' education level was senior high school (n = 87), then bachelor degree (n = 20), diploma (n = 11), primary school (n = 5), and junior high school and postgraduate degree (each n = 1). The high response from younger demography may be influenced by their status as unmarried. Apart from managing their businesses, the older ones were busy with homeschooling, childcare, and other household duties during the pandemic [11], [15], [16]. Thus, they were unavailable to respond to the survey.

Characteristics	N	%	Characteristics	N	%
<i>Women entrepreneurs' age</i>			<i>Business age (in year)</i>		
Below 25	81	64.8	Less than 1	72	57.6
25 - 35	18	14.4	1 - 5	34	27.2
36 - 45	17	13.6	6 - 10	12	9.6
Above 45	9	7.2	11 - 15	5	4.0
<i>Education level</i>			More than 15	2	1.6
No education	0	0	<i>Number of employees</i>		
Primary	5	4.0	1 - 4	116	92.8
Junior high	1	.8	5 - 19	7	5.6
Senior high	87	69.6	20 - 99	2	1.6
Diploma	11	8.8	<i>Area of operation</i>		
Bachelor	20	16.0	Urban	101	80.8
Postgraduate	1	.8	Suburban	24	19.2
<i>Sector</i>			<i>Revenue during the pandemic</i>		
Service	15	12.0	Decreasing	90	72.0
Food and beverage	39	31.2	Stable	32	25.6
General trade	48	38.4	Increasing	3	2.4
Farming	6	4.8			
Crafts	17	13.6			

Table 2:- Respondent Profiles

The sectors spread almost evenly where 38.4% in general trade (n = 48), 31.2% in food and beverage (n = 39), 13.6% in crafts (n = 17), 12% in service (n = 15), and 4.8% in farming (n = 6). The businesses are chiefly young. The rank from the most to the lowest was less than 1 year (n = 72), 1 - 5 years (n = 34), 6 - 10 years (n = 12), 11 - 15 years (n = 5), and more than 15 years (n = 2). Also, of 92.8% women MSMEs employed between 1 to 4 employees (n = 116) and the rest hired 5 - 19 (n = 7) and 20 - 99 (n = 2) workers. These responses of young business age and low number of employees are related to the general respondents' age.

The results further show that 80.8% (n = 101) of the women MSMEs catered urban area and 19.2% in suburban (n = 24). A total of 72% (n = 90) of the women entrepreneurs admitted that their ventures experience decreasing revenue during the pandemic, while the remaining is stable (n = 32) and even increasing (n = 3). This is reasonable and in line with the preceding findings of the impacts of the coronavirus crisis on women entrepreneurs [3], [11], [15], [16], [78].

Characteristics	N	%
<i>Strategy employed to increase sales during the pandemic</i>		
Social media marketing	98	78.4
Offering new products/services	35	28.0
Offering promotion	61	48.8
Others	6	4.8
<i>The most effective place to sell during the pandemic</i>		
Physical stores	23	18.4
Social media	69	55.2
E-commerce	18	14.4
Online food delivery services	6	4.8
Others	9	7.2

Table 3:- Sales Strategy during the Pandemic

**B. Interview results**

Interviewee	Age	Education Level	Sector	Business Age	Number of Employees	Area of Operation	Revenue
01	Below 25	Senior high	Food and beverage	Less than 1	1 - 4	Suburban	Decreasing
02	Below 25	Senior high	Service	Less than 1	5 - 19	Suburban	Decreasing
03	25 - 35	Senior high	Service	Less than 1	5 - 19	Urban	Decreasing
04	25 - 35	Diploma	Food and beverage	Less than 1	1 - 4	Urban	Decreasing
05	Below 25	Bachelor	Crafts	1 - 5	1 - 4	Urban	Decreasing
06	Below 25	Bachelor	Crafts	1 - 5	1 - 4	Urban	Decreasing
07	36 - 45	Postgraduate	Food and beverage	1 - 5	1 - 4	Urban	Stable
08	Above 45	Primary	General trade	More than 15	5 - 19	Urban	Decreasing
09	Below 25	Senior high	Food and beverage	1 - 5	5 - 19	Urban	Stable
10	25 - 35	Senior high	Crafts	1 - 5	5 - 19	Urban	Decreasing

Table 5:- Interviewees Profiles

The second part of the survey attempted to verify whether the women MSMEs understudy deployed SMM. Participants could pick more than one answers in this part. Table 2 shows the discovery. The figure proves that 78.4% (n = 98) utilised SMM. The remaining offered new promotion (n = 61) and new products or services (n = 35); and applied other strategy (n = 6). Participants further reveal that the most effective place to sell during the pandemic was social media (n = 69). The other places were physical stores (n = 23), e-commerce (n = 18), other venues (n = 9), and online food delivery service platforms (n = 6). These findings are in line with previous studies [3], [78]. The restrictions of movement prompt people to purchase goods online. Accordingly, to reach their target consumers women entrepreneurs deploy digital tools such as social media.

Characteristics	N	%
Facebook	72	57.6
Instagram	83	66.4
WhatsApp	95	76.0
YouTube	8	6.4
Twitter	8	6.4
Others	5	4.0

Table 4:- Social Media Used as a Marketing Strategy During the Pandemic

The last part of the survey inquired about social media being used as an SMM strategy by women MSMEs. Resembling with the second part, this section allowed respondents to check more than one options. Table 3 unveil the findings. WhatsApp was the most popular application among the respondents (n = 95). The other applications were Instagram (n = 83), Facebook (n = 72), YouTube and Twitter (each n = 8), as well as other channels (n = 5). The findings are logical because the key social media players in Indonesia are Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Twitter [79], [80]. The women entrepreneurs market and sell their products onto the applications their prospects and consumers use the most.

This study conducted interviews with 10 women MSME owners who manage to survive their entrepreneurship during the virus outbreak. To achieve representativeness, this research attempted to collect responses from varied interviewees. The interviews aimed to explore their SMM strategy during the Covid-19 pandemic. Table 4 summarizes their profiles.

SMM Strategy	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10
Post and Share	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Word-of-Mouth	X	-	-	X	X	-	X	-	X	-
Follow-for-Follow	-	X	-	X	-	-	X	-	X	X
Paid Strategy	-	-	-	X	-	-	X	X	X	-
Strategy Evaluation	X	X	-	X	-	-	X	X	X	-

Table 6:- Social Media Marketing Strategy during the Pandemic

The current research also aims to unveil the common strategy adopted by women entrepreneurs to revive their ventures in the period of endemic. Table 5 exhibits their responses. Overall, the interviews managed to discover significant revelations. Despite living in Indonesia as a developing country, the women entrepreneurs are aware of the availability and benefits of SMM strategy. Such actualities are contradictory with prior research stating that women entrepreneurs are low in entrepreneurial skills [67], unfamiliar with technology [32], and unable to execute SMM effectively [64]–[66]. However, the respondents in the current study both in the survey and interview are predominantly young women. Technology and social media are a part of their life. If the pandemic compels them to transform into digital platforms, they could implement them intuitively. In terms of strategy, they can learn and experiment.

➤ *Post and share*

All of the women entrepreneurs interviewed implemented post and share strategy. The approach began by designing the contents and the process differed from one another depending on their graphic design skills.

People are attracted to beautiful contents. So, I use the app Canva to design my business social media posts. I have no artistic skills. I simply take pictures of my products and post them.

I purchased social media templates on the internet and adjusted them according to my business concept.

Furthermore, 7 of the interviewees admitted that they posted their contents strategically (e.g., implementing vividness, remuneration, and entertainment). They also schedule their posting activities.

I have themes for my social media accounts.

The contents are varied on my social media accounts. I sometimes post memes and jokes on my social media accounts instead of just promoting my products.

I read the data on my social media account. I post my contents only when my followers are online.

The entrepreneurs then posted the contents on their social media accounts. They also reached their networks and shared the contents with them. There was also an admission that they posted their contents more during the pandemic.

I continuously share contents using the InstaStory feature on my Instagram account.

I share the photos I posted on my social media accounts to all the WhatsApp groups on my phone.

I share more contents on the feed of my Facebook and Instagram business accounts during the pandemic.

Studies have evidenced that brands should execute formulaic and stylized contents to achieve optimum results. They should involve the elements of entertainment, social, remuneration [48], interactivity [49], promotion, human resources, statement, charity, holiday, competition [33], and vividness [50]. Brands also should consider the factor of timing as it can affect social media performance [51]–[53]. The results from the interviews show that women MSME owners acknowledged the need to post and share contents strategically. They tried to provide attractive and diverse contents. They also scheduled their posts according to their audiences. In addition, they share their contents on multiple platforms and features. They might orchestrate such an approach due to the inclination to amplify SMM advantages.

➤ *Word-of-mouth*

Women entrepreneurs implemented WOM in their SMM strategy. Half of the interviewees stated that their prospects followed and purchased their products after seeing the contents posted by other customers. The benefits depicted in this finding are in line with preceding analyses on the significance of WOM [54]–[56]. It should be noted however, there is an emphasis that the WOM is involuntary. Women MSME owners demanded their family, friends, and customers to perform WOM.

I ask my family and friends to repost my contents on their social media accounts. Some of their friends contacted me to inquire about my offerings.

I ask my family and friends to share my contents with their WhatsApp groups. After they share the contents, some of their connections reached me to enjoy the service I offer.

I encourage my customers to give reviews about my crafts on their social media accounts.

➤ *Follow-for-follow*

Half of the interviewees explained that they performed the follow-for-follow strategy. They deemed the procedure was effective to generate traffics to their social media accounts. This discovery accords with the study of Virtanen et al. [57]. The finding from the interviews further affirms that the follow-for-follow could generate quality leads and sales for women MSMEs. This method succeeded because it was strategic. The women entrepreneurs merely interacted (i.e., follow, like, and comment) with those prospects that were relevant to their businesses.

I begin the activity by identifying businesses that resemble mine on Instagram. I then click the followers button on my competitors' accounts. Afterwards, I simply follow my competitors' followers and like or comments on their posts. Some of them followed back and some even intended to purchase my products.

I identify the influencers and artists my prospects might follow on Instagram. I then follow many of those influencers and artists' followers.

➤ *Paid strategy*

Paid SMM strategy was beneficial for 4 of the participants. The approach could enhance engagement and sales. The information corresponds to the studies of Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández [58], Lou, Tan, & Chen [59], and Wahid [45]. The finding reveals that the paid methods implemented were Instagram Ads and influencer marketing. The preference might be due to its affordability. In Indonesia, Instagram Ads charges brands and people as low as Rp20,000 per day. The interviewees might also choose micro-influencers for their SMM. Such steps are rational as women entrepreneurs lack resources [8]–[11].

My son utilises Instagram Ads to promote my business. The benefits are much bigger than the cost. It can bring in new and repeat customers.

I paid local influencers to promote my business. The strategy promotes the growth of my business followers.

➤ *Strategy evaluation*

All the respondents that implemented a paid strategy explained that they evaluated their methods. This revelation opposes the research of McCann & Barlow [66]. This evaluation occurred because the women MSME owners expended their funds and the pandemic adversely affected their income [11], [15], [16], [78]. They would avoid unnecessary spending and expect a return from their investment. They also stated that they monitored the likes and comments on their posts. If the figures were low, then they would consider strategy was ineffective and in need of substitution.

I have paid for the Instagram Ads service. If the investment is bigger than the return, I'll stop using it.

I paid the influencer to attract prospects to my social media accounts. If there are no prospects from that influencer then there is something wrong. It could be the campaign or it is just the influencer that is irrelevant to my business.

I observe the likes and comments on my contents. If the numbers are low, I'll experiment with other types of contents.

## V. IMPLICATIONS

### A. Theoretical implications

Researchers have discussed women entrepreneurship extensively. Nevertheless, to date, only this current study explored and explained women MSMEs from an SMM viewpoint, particularly in the event of Covid-19 pandemic. As such, the research offers several contributions to women MSMEs scholarships. The findings identified women MSME owners' posting and sharing strategy in the context of SMM. In terms of design, they created their contents using a smartphone application (i.e., Canva) or purchasing templates. There were also attempts to post diverse contents. These two approaches aimed to provide contents that could attract prospects to their business social media accounts. Women MSME owners further scheduled their posts according to their social media followers' online availability. During the pandemic, the women posted their contents more often and share them on multiple social media platforms. This indicates that women MSME owners acknowledged how contents can improve social media performance as signified by preceding literature [33], [44], [48]–[52].

This study further revealed that there was an application of WOM in women MSMEs' SMM strategy. Evidence of Goodrich & de Mooij [54], Hutter et al. [55], and Park et al. [56] present the values of WOM. However, they are in the context of established firms. The discussion of WOM and its effects on women-owned entrepreneurship is nonexistent. Further research is needed, but this study is the first to discuss WOM in women MSMEs. In addition, women MSME owners performed follow-for-follow strategy. To date, only Virtanen et al. [57] investigated the follow-for-follow approach in SMEs. The process conducted by women in this study grants understanding to the literature on how women MSME owners implemented a follow-for-follow strategy to improve their social media performance.

Women MSMEs also executed paid SMM strategy. They spent their finance on Instagram Ads and influencer marketing. Although the discussion on the topic of influencer marketing is extensive [58], [59], the literature rarely examines it in the context of women MSMEs. The subject of native ads is also nearly absent in SMM scholarship [45]. This study has initiated the effort to unveil the implementation of paid SMM strategy in the forms of influencer marketing and native ads in women MSMEs. The research also generated knowledge about the benefits of paid SMM strategy during the Covid-19 pandemic for women MSMEs. Further research should expand paid SMM literature by investigating influencer marketing for women

MSMEs using specific industry in different countries. There is also an exigency to inspect native ads efficacy for women MSMEs on other social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and TikTok.

There is a demonstration of SMM strategy evaluation in this study. This contradicts with the prior research of McCann & Barlow [66] stating that SMEs neglect to reflect on their SMM strategy. This study suggests that the condition transpired because women MSMEs possess limited resources [8]–[10] and the pandemic diminishes their income [11], [15], [16], [78]. Thus, women entrepreneurs avoid business activities that would cause their ventures financial troubles. The finding contributes to SMM scholarships by declaring the importance of SMM evaluation for women MSMEs. Overall, this exploration offers novel contributions to the literature of woman MSMEs, particularly in the context of a developing country in the event of Covid-19 pandemic.

### B. Practical implications

Women MSMEs can gain insights from this study and implement them in their SMM strategy. They should learn how to design their contents on a smartphone application such as Canva. If the women own no artistic skills, they can buy social media templates and adjust them according to their business themes. They should also avoid consistently posting plain product contents. Their social media feed should include variations (e.g., entertainment, remuneration, and innovation contents). Additionally, scheduling is important for SMM. Women MSMEs should share their contents when their followers are online. Specifically, during the pandemic, women MSME owners should intensify the number of their posts and spread them to multiple social media channels. Women MSMEs should also apply the follow-for-follow strategy. This starts by identifying competitors. Subsequently, women MSMEs click on the identified accounts' followers button. Then, they follow the competitors' followers and like or comments on their posts. Women MSMEs can also perform similar actions on the social media accounts of influencers that are relevant to their businesses. This study further suggests women MSMEs to encourage their family, friends, and customers to share contents about their products. Another approach is paid SMM strategy. Women MSMEs can spend on influencers or native ads (e.g., Instagram Ads). This method is affordable and effective for marketing especially during the pandemic where the majority of consumers purchase their needs and wants online. Lastly, women MSMEs should evaluate their strategy. If it is fruitful, they can continue and improve. Otherwise, they can stop the method and experiment with a new approach.

Government and policymakers also can benefit from this study. Women MSMEs apply a low level of entrepreneurial skills in their business activities [67] and possess limited resources [13], [14]. Further, during the Covid-19 pandemic, women MSMEs need to transform to digital platforms to survive [3], [11], [16], [78]. Therefore, women MSMEs require guidance, human capital, and new skills to utilise technology [16]. This study informs the

government and policymakers of the detail and in-depth insights into SMM strategy. They can organize SMM training for women entrepreneurship. Eventually, because there is extensive evidence that women entrepreneurship can contribute to driving economic growth [68]–[73], this study may help policymakers and government to assist women entrepreneurs to survive the Covid-19 pandemic and revive the economy.

## VI. CONCLUSION

There is a novelty in this study of SMM strategy in women MSMEs. The research is also beneficial for literature, practitioners, government, and policymakers. Nevertheless, there are several limitations to this study. The participants were predominantly young demography and there was a likelihood that they were unmarried. Such a situation occurred because apart from managing their businesses, the older ones were busy with homeschooling, childcare, and other household duties during the pandemic [11], [15], [16]. Hence, they were unavailable to respond to the survey. This reduces representativeness. The younger generation is highly familiar with technology and the world of social media. This study was also conducted in November 2020 where businesses and consumers have been accustomed to the new normal. In addition, this study used a small sample of women MSMEs in Palembang, Indonesia. Culture and government stimulus might play some parts in shaping responses to the Covid-19 outbreak. All these facts may influence the survey and interview results.

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