



MARKETING COMMUNICATION STRATEGY IN HEALTH BUSINESS OF NUTRITION CLUBS

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Abstract

This study employs a quantitative descriptive method to examine the marketing communication strategies of Nutrition Clubs, a health business that distributes Herbalife products. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with representatives from 10 Nutrition Clubs located in Jakarta, Denpasar, and Yogyakarta. The findings reveal that all Nutrition Clubs utilize the eight elements of the marketing communication mix, although their emphasis varies depending on consumer demographics and the capabilities of each club's human resources. Nutrition Clubs in Denpasar tend to adopt a lifestyle-oriented approach by organizing various events, whereas those in Jakarta and Yogyakarta prefer a more personal approach through direct selling activities. Limited resources pose challenges for these clubs, particularly in effectively segmenting and targeting millennial consumers.

Keywords Nutrition Club, Health Products, Health Business, Marketing Communication Mix, Herbalife

Abstrak

Riset ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kuantitatif untuk menjelaskan tentang strategi komunikasi pemasaran bisnis kesehatan Nutrition Clubs. Nutrition Club merupakan rumah nutrisi yang menjual produk dari Herbalife. Penelitian ini menggunakan wawancara mendalam terhadap 10 Nutritional Club yang tersebar di Jakarta, Denpasar, dan Yogyakarta. Penelitian menunjukkan bahwa semua Nutrition Club yang diwawancarai menggunakan delapan elemen bauran komunikasi pemasaran, namun fokus mereka bervariasi berdasarkan latar belakang konsumen dan kemampuan sumber daya manusia pada Nutrition Clubs. Nutrition Clubs di Denpasar cenderung menggunakan pendekatan gaya hidup dengan membuat berbagai event, sedangkan Nutrition Clubs di Jakarta dan Yogyakarta menggunakan pendekatan personal melalui berbagai aktivitas personal selling. Keterbatasan sumber daya pada Nutrition Clubs menghambat proses penentuan segmentasi dan penargetan yang efektif, terutama dalam menargetkan konsumen generasi milenial.

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INTRODUCTION

The health business of nutrition centers, commonly referred to as Nutrition Clubs (NC), has seen a significant rise. NC is a marketing strategy implemented by the well-known company, Herbalife. An NC is established under certain conditions, including that the owner must be a Herbalife member who has interned at an NC and recruited three customers to participate in the healthy lifestyle program at that NC. Another requirement is that no NC is allowed to use the Herbalife company identity in their promotional activities. This poses a challenge for NC owners in their marketing efforts.

Correspondingly, one of the challenges in the health business is marketing communication strategies, which aim to promote health products or tools in a way that distinguishes them from other health products. In the era of the 4.0 revolution, health promotion has undergone changes, from reactive-curative consumer behavior to proactive-preventive. Additionally, there has been a shift in consumer habits from consuming conventional and non-internet digital advertising to internet-based digital ads.

In the business world, increasing consumer purchase interest is part of the company's goals. Consumer purchase interest occurs when a company is able to craft an effective marketing communication strategy that engages potential customers, leading to purchase interest. Communication strategies in product marketing are crucial because the message conveyed through promotion forms a connection with the consumers.

To increase consumer purchase interest, companies need to employ effective and efficient communication strategies. The importance of effective and efficient communication is vital for a health business, whether it deals with goods or services, as it helps to reach the target audience and inspire customer action (Inegbenebor, 2014).

In carrying out their promotions, NCs in Indonesia strive to use all forms of media as tools to support their promotional activities, in order to attract new customers and turn them into loyal ones. However, each NC attracts a diverse range of consumers, as the health business targets

consumers of all ages, from toddlers to the elderly. These varying consumer characteristics also mean that they have different capacities to process information.

Amidst the increasing competition between NCs, the emergence of new NCs poses a unique challenge for the existing ones. Various marketing communication strategies are employed to maintain their presence. This includes internal communication within the organization and holding inspirational and creative events with organization members, including customers. Inspirational and creative activities help consumers feel comfortable, as their involvement is recognized and valued by the organization. Therefore, marketing communication strategies are critical as they encourage consumer participation. The higher the consumer engagement, the more interested and committed consumers and potential customers will become (Elrod & Fortenberry, 2020)

Research on healthy living movements in rural and urban areas shows that the implementation of healthy lifestyles is generally inadequate. This research also reveals that healthy eating habits are better in rural areas compared to urban areas, whereas physical activity (exercise) is more common among urban residents than those in rural areas (Susanti, Septiyana, & Pradtitta, 2021). Therefore, it can be said that residents in urban areas are a potential target market for Nutrition Clubs (NC) to promote their products, such as fiber-rich drinks meant to replace breakfast and dinner.

The data that was utilized to conduct the study was collected from three different cities in Indonesia, each with distinct characteristics: Jakarta, Denpasar, and Yogyakarta. These cities were chosen because they are all urban centers with diverse community traits. Jakarta is an urban city with the largest population in Indonesia (Kementrian Kesehatan Republik Indonesia, 2022). The diverse population of Jakarta, which comes from various provinces across Indonesia, makes it difficult for residents to adapt and socialize with one another.

The second city is Denpasar, the capital of Bali. This city has a strong local culture that attracts tourists. However, many young people in Denpasar engage in unhealthy lifestyles, such as consuming arak Bali (Balinese local liquor). Moreover, as a tourist destination, Denpasar is closely associated with Western habits such as alcohol consumption, smoking, and nightlife. A study titled "The Culture of Hanging Out in Cafes Among Youth (A Review of Youth Lifestyles

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in Denpasar)" points out that the culture of gathering in cafes has become increasingly popular (Fauzi & Kamajaya, 2017). These gatherings are often linked to unhealthy lifestyle choices.

The final city is Yogyakarta, known as the central hub for students to get their education. Research indicates that 75% of Yogyakarta residents prefer consuming fast food due to its taste and affordability (Pratiwi, Diyah, & Wibowo, 2010). In other words, the majority of the population, mainly students, are not yet aware of healthy living habits.

Previous studies have not yet indicated any further fields, as there has been limited research focusing on marketing communication strategies within the health business of nutrition clubs. One of the few studies conducted examined the marketing communication strategy used by Permata Hati Hospital in Duri, in the Bengkalis Regency, in dealing with business competition (Zahari, 2018). This research analyzed seven aspects of marketing communication strategy. The findings showed that Permata Hati Hospital in Duri utilized six of the seven aspects, including personal selling, advertising, sales promotion, sponsorship, and publicity (Zahari, 2018).

The author wishes to impart that they have previously participated in community service on the topic of marketing communication ethics via social media at Club Panji Sakti Singaraja, one of the NCs in Singaraja, Bali. During this community service, health business operators began to understand and apply ethical marketing communication on social media in promoting Herbalife products (Moleong, 2005).

A study on the communication marketing mix in the healthcare service sector in Turkey was conducted by Elkiyor and Altan (2020). Their findings suggest that promotion is crucial in healthcare services, although it can be very challenging to implement. Other findings indicate that advertising and public relations are also significant aspects in the healthcare field (Aykut & Faith, 2020).

The study conducted, will explore how Nutrition Clubs (NC) in the health business apply marketing communication strategies to increase consumer purchase interest, despite the various regulations imposed by Herbalife. These regulations include restrictions on product promotions due to government policies that require health products to be marketed in a way that does not directly highlight their health benefits. Additionally, the growing number of NCs poses a

challenge in this competitive landscape.

Moreover, the research addresses another pressing issue: users of healthcare services are generally heterogeneous, uncontrolled, and diverse. Therefore, research is needed to select or segment the audience so that healthcare services and products can be designed to be accessible, easy to understand, user-friendly, and appealing to consumers (Ute, 2014).

The research focuses on the marketing communication strategies employed by health businesses, specifically Nutrition Clubs (NC), to improve customer loyalty. One of the multinational corporations that sells its goods through the multilevel marketing approach is Herbalife. Despite being a worldwide business, Herbalife employs a distinct approach from other multinational brands. Herbalife uses personal connections (word of mouth) and community-based marketing, including customer testimonials and firsthand accounts. Additionally, famous athletes like Cristiano Ronaldo frequently serve as brand advocates for Herbalife. To establish credibility and a positive image of health, Herbalife also frequently sponsors a number of sporting events.

Previous studies show that health businesses use marketing communication aspects commonly utilized by both product- and service-based businesses to handle competition. Community service projects conducted by the researcher also revealed that social media is one of the marketing communication strategies used by NCs. Therefore, this study contributes to the existing literature by providing insights into the marketing communication strategies employed by health businesses to boost customer loyalty.

The research questions in this study are as follows: (a) How do Nutrition Clubs in the health business use marketing communication strategies to increase consumer purchase interest? (b) What are the supporting factors for marketing communication strategies in boosting consumer purchase interest? (c) What are the obstacles faced by marketing communication strategies in increasing consumer purchase interest?

METHOD

The study utilizes a qualitative research method with a descriptive study research design. Descriptive research is built by creating systematic, actual, and factual descriptions or depictions

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of the facts, characteristics, and relationships between the phenomena being investigated (Sugiyono, 2010). In accordance with this definition, the research will systematically describe the marketing communication strategies employed by Nutrition Clubs (NC) in the health business to increase consumer purchase interest. Several data collection techniques will be utilized, these collection techniques are as follows:

1. Primary Data Collection

Primary data collection technique in this research involves in-depth interviews with 10 informants who manage Nutrition Clubs in three major cities: Jakarta, Denpasar, and Bandung. The informants were selected using the purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling is a method where the selection of informants is based on specific criteria. In this study, the criterion for selecting informants is that informants must previously or are currently running a health business for at least five years. By choosing informants who have managed a health business for at least five years, they are expected to provide in-depth data, having experienced the ups and downs of the health business, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The interviews will be conducted using an interview guide. This guide is designed based on the Marketing Communication Mix theory by Kotler and Keller. The marketing communication mix is used by companies to inform, persuade, and remind consumers (Zahari, 2005). According to the marketing communication mix, there are several communication channels that can be utilized in marketing activities, including: a) Advertising; b) Personal Selling; c) Sales Promotion; d) Events and Experiences; e) PR and Publicity; f) Direct Marketing; and g) Interactive Marketing.

The effectiveness of marketing communication depends on how well the communication mix is used to reach different target audiences. A balanced marketing communication mix supports brand competitiveness and can lead to an expansion in market share and influence (Murzoza, 2022).

2. Secondary Data Collection

Secondary data collection techniques within the study comprises of observation results and literature review. The observation technique involves recording facts observed in the field (in the cities of Jakarta, Denpasar, and Yogyakarta). Meanwhile, the literature review is carried out by

searching for relevant research literature, such as research journals, books, and reliable data related to the research focus and location.

After data collection is complete, the next step is data analysis. The analysis is carried out through three stages of activity, which are:

1. Data Reduction

Data reduction is the process of selecting, summarizing, and transforming raw data from written records obtained during fieldwork. The data from observations, interviews, and documentation are then reduced or summarized, focusing on the aspects considered important. Key points are selected, and themes and patterns are identified. This process of data reduction helps researchers by providing a clearer view when conducting further data collection.

2. Data Presentation

Data presentation is one of the most crucial activities in qualitative research. It involves organizing information in such a way that allows for drawing conclusions and making decisions (Ulber, 2009). Data can be presented in various forms, such as brief descriptions, flowcharts, diagrams, relationships between categories, and similar formats. In this research, the data will be presented using a narrative text format.

3. Data Conclusion

Conclusions in qualitative research can be provisional, as they may either answer the research questions or lead to new findings that were not apparent in earlier stages. A conclusion is considered credible if, during data presentation, it is supported by appropriate data.

Triangulation in research is a procedure for verifying data obtained from various sources, using different methods and at different times (Dewi, 2022). There are three types of triangulations that can be employed in research:

1. Source Triangulation

Source triangulation tests the credibility of data by cross-checking the information gathered from multiple data sources, such as interviews, archives, and other documents.

2. Technique Triangulation

Triangulation Technique involves verifying the credibility of data by cross-checking

information obtained from the same source using different techniques. For example, data collected through observation can be verified through interviews.

3. Time Triangulation

The timing of data collection, and the overall timeframe itself can influence its credibility. Data obtained through interviews conducted in the morning, when the informants are still fresh, may be more valid. Therefore, to ensure data credibility, verification must be done through observation, interviews, and documentation at different times.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research Finding

As for the results of this study, the author found that from all the nutrition club that were used as sources, the author found that the nutrition healthy club business maximized different marketing communication elements. This is because the nutrition club has different target markets.

Bali has a variety of consumers using a lifestyle marketing approach. On the other hand, nutrition clubs in Jakarta use more personal selling with consumers aged 40 years and above. Likewise with the city of Yogyakarta.

Discussion

Advertising

Advertising is one of the most commonly used promotional media by companies to market their products (Tjiptono, 2008). The form of advertising messages typically uses persuasive language targeting specific groups of people (Saladin, 2003). As a paid medium, advertisers need to map out customers and potential customers to ensure that advertisements reach their targets effectively and efficiently.

Herbalife, being a meal replacement product, has a very broad target segmentation. In interviews with several nutrition clubs (NCs), a customer shared that her child started consuming Herbalife products as soon as she started menstruating, around the age of 13. Additionally,

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observations revealed that Herbalife customers also include elderly individuals. The diversity of consumer segments requires nutrition club managers to design tailored advertising messages and select appropriate media channels for their target audience.

Advertising for health products or services is particularly complex due to various government regulations governing the promotion of health products and services. One of the key regulations in Indonesia is Law No. 36 of 2009 on Health, which governs consumer protection, the accuracy of information, and oversight of health products. Additionally, regulations from the Ministry of Health regarding health advertising include PMK No. 1787 of 2010 on Health Services Advertising and Publication and PMK No. 76 of 2013 on Medical Devices and Health Supplies Advertising.

Herbalife's advertising activities are guided by the Herbalife Nutrition Code of Business Conduct and Ethics. While this guideline does not provide detailed advertising instructions, it clearly states that all Herbalife employees and non-employees with business relations with the company must adhere to local government regulations (Herbalife, 2024). According to the interviews conducted, it was revealed that not all NCs engage in paid advertising. For example, the KJ Nutrition Club prefers word-of-mouth marketing over paid ads, as they believe Herbalife's business model emphasizes personal relationships, which cannot be achieved through traditional advertising. Customers attracted by word-of-mouth marketing tend to have greater awareness of healthy living and often exhibit higher loyalty (Oktini, 2011).

Paid advertising methods are utilized by some NCs, such as flyer distribution at traffic lights. One nutrition club mentioned that they used to advertise in newspapers but ceased due to increasing costs and declining newspaper readership. They now prefer flyers as it allows for interpersonal communication with potential customers, which is believed to provide a stronger persuasive effect. This was also confirmed by Dewi (2022) in her research on flyer advertising effectiveness, where she used the EPIC model to show that flyer/brochure advertising has high persuasion effectiveness.

Sales Promotions

Sales promotions involve offering incentives or bonuses for a limited time to persuade or

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encourage consumer interest (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Sales promotions are also part of Herbalife's Code of Conduct, which restricts offering free products, discounts beyond the official Herbalife discounts, or special offers (Herbalife, 2024). According to the interviews conducted, it was found that all NCs comply with the rules in the Code of Conduct, following the official pricing and promotions from Herbalife.

This has prompted NCs to create innovative sales promotions that adhere to company guidelines. For instance, the owner of the CPS Nutrition Club, who is also a fitness enthusiast, offers gifts related to fitness equipment to members who fully pay for products during certain months. Furthermore, some NCs provide installment plans or product "arisan" (a rotating savings group) to facilitate product purchases for members.

Event and Experience

Event and experience-based marketing is another element of communication strategy that involves customers in activities. These activities engage all of the customers' senses, creating an imaginative experience with the product (Tresnati, 2011). For example, the TA Nutrition Club primarily holds indoor activities such as product "arisan" and regular health information sessions, which cater to their customer base of local market vendors, most of whom are women aged 45 and above with limited free time.

On the other hand, NCs like CPS, DD, SS, CD, and CCF cater to a broader age range, from teenagers to adults, by offering a variety of regular activities such as healthy lunch gatherings, monthly outdoor activities (e.g., during August), skincare days using Herbalife products, birthday surprises for customers, and gift exchanges during New Year. Among them, CPS Nutrition Club stands out for its well-organized weekly activities. Every Monday and Wednesday, they educate consumers on healthy eating and living habits. Tuesdays and Thursdays are dedicated to group workouts, and Fridays feature healthy lunch sessions at the club.

These activities entice customers to be more interested in purchasing and using Herbalife products because they directly experience the benefits of the products, creating a sense of comfort. One customer mentioned that they often spend their mornings until the evenings at the nutrition club because of the comfort that is offered. This suggests that event and experience marketing is

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tailored to the specific needs and demographics of each NC, creating unique and meaningful engagement for customers.

PR and Publicity

Public relations (PR) and publicity aim to build a strong corporate image and reputation while gaining public support for the company and its products (Dharma, Utomo, & Emeilia, 2023). Conversely however, with the increase in competition in the business world, companies are developing various strategies. Morissan (2010) suggests that intense competition forces companies to combine marketing strategies for more effective outcomes. Businesses are realizing that relying solely on traditional advertising is no longer sufficient; instead, integrated programs are essential to win customers' loyalty (Dharma, Utomo, & Emeilia, 2023).

In the nutrition club business, there is growing awareness of the importance of building a good corporate name. For example, the CPS Nutrition Club organizes monthly events in collaboration with other clubs in Denpasar and local health clinics. These events, aimed at promoting the government's "Healthy Living Community Movement" (Germas), include activities such as senior and Zumba fitness classes, free health checkups, and the distribution of free Herbalife health drinks in both rural and urban areas. This commitment to public health has fostered consumer loyalty and pride in using Herbalife products. A CPS customer shared that they were introduced to Herbalife through one of these community events, ultimately leading to regular product use.

Other clubs, like DD and SS, focus on health-related events during weekly car-free days and organize 5km runs during specific months. Clubs such as CD and CCF emphasize environmental health through beach and public area cleanups, engaging their customers in these activities.

Conversely, clubs like CC, K, and TA do not implement PR and publicity strategies. CC lacks resources and a large member base, while K cites limited human resources and promotional knowledge. TA focuses more on retail sales rather than building a nutrition club atmosphere.

In conclusion, PR and publicity have become crucial in the health business, as seven out of ten nutrition clubs studied implement these strategies, while three do not due to resource

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limitations.

Direct Marketing

Direct marketing is often the primary element in company strategies, but in the health and nutrition club business, it is more limited. Direct marketing is typically employed to communicate with consumers and receive immediate responses, aligned with Herbalife's regulations. All ten nutrition clubs use direct marketing via flyers and social media, emphasizing health education over direct product promotions. CPS Nutrition Club, for instance, uses WhatsApp and Facebook for communication and maintains a customer database for personalized follow-ups. They conduct educational sessions on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays via WhatsApp groups.

Direct marketing also allows for real-time, interactive communication, with the ability to quickly adjust messages based on consumer responses (Firmansyah, 2020). TA Nutrition Club entrusts two admins to handle customer information via WhatsApp, where they also share educational content when customers need more clarification on Herbalife products or health information.

Interactive Marketing

Interactive marketing is essential for fostering customer engagement. According to Kotler and Keller (2012), interactive marketing includes online activities and programs designed to involve customers or prospects, boost brand awareness, improve corporate image, or drive product sales. In the context of nutrition clubs, this often involves personalized communication aimed at fulfilling promises made through external marketing.

For instance, Nutrition Club J maintains strong relationships with its customers by providing regular health updates and education. This includes guidance on daily water intake, necessary nutrients, and other health-related topics. Similar practices are observed at clubs CSP, SS, and CCF, which tailor communication based on individual customer needs, helping to gather valuable data that informs product development and services (Firmansyah, 2020).

Word-of-mouth (WOM) communication also plays a significant role in interactive marketing, especially in health businesses like Herbalife. WOM involves recommendations from individuals or groups based on personal experiences, which heavily influence others' purchasing

decisions (Kotler and Keller, 2012). This strategy works well because it relies on genuine experiences rather than promotional material, helping to attract more consumers.

Personal Selling

Personal selling is one of the most effective marketing communication activities for companies. It helps boost a person's willingness to try or buy a product due to the direct communication and personal interaction involved (Ali and Widodo, 2022). DD Nutrition Club, for example, places personal selling at the core of its strategy because the owner is highly social and active in health-related communities like cycling and gym training. This network often brings in more customers than social media would.

Other clubs like CC, J, K, CPS, CCF, DC, and KJ also prefer personal selling because they find it easier to deliver educational messages through face-to-face communication. Physical evidence, such as the owner's own health and fitness, strengthens their sales strategy. Online marketing, on the other hand, can sometimes lead to skepticism as consumers may assume the visuals are edited.

Interestingly, SS Nutrition Club, with a younger customer base (Gen Z and millennials), is more comfortable with social media marketing, adopting a lifestyle approach for its communications. In contrast, TA Nutrition Club relies on professional help for content creation, employing two administrators to handle their social media marketing. Despite this, TA does not fully leverage personal selling due to its focus on broad retail sales, which limits the effectiveness of personal interactions.

In summary, while personal selling is a dominant strategy for many nutrition clubs, others have adapted to their customers' demographic needs, with some leveraging social media and lifestyle marketing more effectively

CONCLUSION

This research aims to examine the marketing communication strategies in Nutrition Club health businesses to enhance consumer purchasing interest, as well as to map out the supporting and inhibiting factors of the marketing communication strategies implemented to increase

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consumer buying interest. The research was conducted through in-depth interviews with 10 Nutricion Clubs located in Jakarta, Yogyakarta, and Denpasar. Research findings indicate that all interviewed Nutricion Clubs have utilized the eight elements found in the marketing communication mix, namely advertising, sales promotion, event and experience, PR and publicity, direct marketing, interactive marketing, sales promotion, and personal selling. However, the main focus of implementing these elements varies according to the suitability of consumer backgrounds and the capabilities of human resources.

The findings of this research indicate that although Herbalife is a global company, various communication strategies are used to be accepted by consumers in three major cities in Indonesia. The three major cities, Denpasar, Yogyakarta, and Jakarta, have different consumer characteristics. Therefore, the marketing communication strategies used are also different. In Denpasar, the strategy uses a lifestyle approach, so Nutricion Clubs in this city organizes various sports events to introduce the product to consumers. Meanwhile, in Jakarta and Yogyakarta, Nutricion Clubs takes a different approach from Denpasar. Nutricion Clubs in Jakarta and Yogyakarta uses a personal approach to attract consumers. Therefore, Nutricion Clubs in Jakarta and Yogyakarta extensively uses personal selling to attract consumers. The findings indicate that as a global health product, Herbalife still needs to adjust its marketing communication strategy to align with the characteristics of its consumers.

The limitations in the quantity and capabilities of human resources regarding segmentation, targeting, and positioning in several Nutricion Clubs become a hindrance in attracting the millennial generation as new consumers. However, the approach through educational communication and lifestyle strategies serves as supporting factors in their marketing communication strategy to enhance consumer purchasing interest in some of the Nutricion Clubs.

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