

# Re-Strategy Personal Selling Of Cobb-Vantress, Inc. During The Covid-19 Pandemic

Farhan Amarrahman Suyono<sup>1</sup>, Indra Novianto Adibayu Pamungkas<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Communication Science, Faculty of Communication and Business, Telkom University, Indonesia, hansharusaki@student.telkomuniversity.ac.id

<sup>2</sup> Communication Science, Faculty of Communication and Business, Telkom University, Indonesia, indrapamungkas@telkomuniversity.ac.id

## Abstract

*Many businesses have struggled to survive since the economic crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, especially livestock companies. Many of them have redesigned their strategy in running their business, including their strategy in marketing communications. This research aims to discuss more deeply about the re-strategy carried out by COBB-Vantress, inc. with descriptive qualitative method. In this research, Cobb-Vantress, Inc. able to carry out personal selling by doing it in a hybrid manner without losing the essence that makes personal selling run well.*

*Keywords-process, personal selling, marketing communication*

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## Abstrak

Banyak usaha usaha yang berjuang untuk bertahan semenjak krisis ekonomi akibat pandemi COVID-19 di tahun 2020 khususnya perusahaan peternakan. Mereka banyak yang merancang ulang strategi nya dalam menjalankan bisnisnya termasuk strategi nya dalam marketing komunikasi. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk membahas lebih dalam tentang strategi ulang yang dilakukan oleh COBB-Vantress, inc. dengan metode kualitatif deskriptif. Dalam penelitian ini, Cobb-Vantress, Inc. mampu menjalankan personal sellingnya dengan melaksanakannya secara hybrid tanpa menghilangkan esensi esensi yang membuat personal selling terjalankan dengan baik.

Kata Kunci-proses, penjualan personal, komunikasi pemasaran

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) as a pandemic on 11th March 2020. The disease made countries around the globe went on a public health emergency. The pandemic was also threatening the market stability. (Shaikh, 2020). The physical distancing protocol was applied to prevent the disease from spreading (Flaxman et al. 2020). This situation threatened the economic growth in many countries. Many businesses were struggling to adapt to the situation.

In Indonesia, adjustment and changes on poultry-based food supply pattern applied with the Government Law No. 21/2020. The COVID-19 pandemic affected the decrease of demand for poultry products. This was also resulting in the instability of poultry product prices in the market. Also, the raise of animal feed prices and medicine were affecting the situation. (Sukmawati; Asmawati; Nurhidayanti; Abubakar, 2020).

Cobb-Vantress, Inc. as one of the players in the global livestock industry which is responsible for providing genetic chicken to chicken farming business in Indonesia, has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic phenomenon. Cobb-Vantress, inc. has reported that in 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic, they had made 5.726.235 USD total sales in Indonesia while the pandemic hit in 2020, they had made 4.523.426 USD total sales.

Since they are operating on business-to-business services, they were used to hold an offline seminar and company visit to inform the customer about the benefits of using their products. Personal selling is used as their tool in marketing

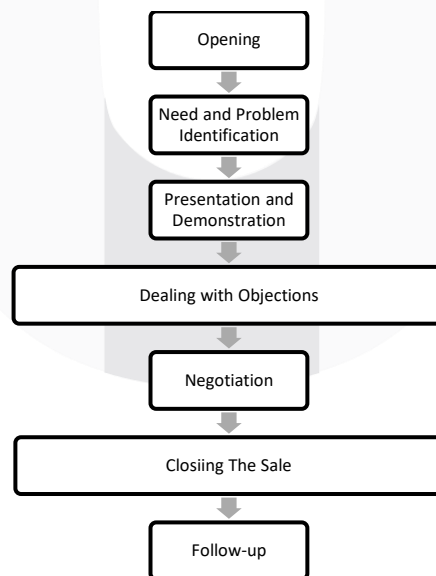
communication in the aim of building their client loyalty. Since the travel ban and other government regulation concerning the COVID-19 Pandemic, They are more often held an online Webinar on the topics of poultry area along with the online personal selling through video conferences, phone calls, and e-mail as their marketing communication tools to persuade client in buying their genetic chicken.

Personal selling were believed to be an efficient marketing tool to build their client loyalty because they believe that the persuasive information was delivered more efficiently in two-way personal communication than the one-way public marketing communication strategy. As a result, it generates a higher client’s attention on the Cobb-Vantress, Inc. genetic chicken. They are also very open to the client’s complaint and give consultation to the client as they are also provide the solution the client’s problem in keeping the genetic chicken.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

As a part of marketing communication tools, personal selling holds an important role to this research as the research would like to take an in-depth look on how Cobb-Vantress, inc. shifted their personal selling strategy during the COVID-19 pandemic. Personal sales are a form of interpersonal communication, usually in the form of purchases, that provide potential buyers with information aimed at meeting their needs in the hope of responding (Kayode, 2014). It can also be defined as an oral presentation in a conversation or discussion with one or more prospective buyers for sale. Face-to-face sales include a lively, direct and interactive relationship between two or more people. Each party can carefully observe the needs and characteristics of the other and make immediate adjustments.

The ability of personal selling is developed with the seven steps of personal selling process. As pictured in the figure below, the goal of personal selling itself can be raised during the process of selling between dealing sales to closing sales. Further, arrangements might possibly happen or may happen during one of the stages. The advanced selling measure expects that the salesman ordinarily will play out the different strides of the cycle in some structure, yet the means (stages) don't happen for every business call. Maybe, they happen after some time, achieved by different individuals inside the selling firm, and not really in some random succession (Jobber et al., 2019). The process of personal selling could be described with picture 1 as below:



Picture 1. The Process of Personal Selling (Jobber et al., 2019)

### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this research, Researcher use interpretive paradigm as it sees social reality as something that is dynamic, full of process and subjectivity. Interpretive paradigm is born as a reaction towards positivistic paradigm that is believed to be less comprehensive to explain the reality. According to Patton (1990: 68), interpretive paradigm is also described as phenomenology paradigm or naturalistic. Interpretive paradigm also sees reality as something that is holistic, can't be separable, complex and reciprocal. Human position in interpretive paradigm as a creature that has consciousness and intentionally acts. According to Hendrarti (2010: 4), interpretive paradigm sees social science as a systematic analysis of socially meaningful action through direct observation toward social actor in scientific background to understand and translate how social actor creates and treat their social world.

In this research, the researcher is using descriptive qualitative research method. Qualitative research method is an approach that is meant to understand deeply to receive perspective about thinking, feeling, reasoning behind behaviour, system, value, motivation, goals, culture and also the lifestyle of people that is being researched. Generally, descriptive research is aiming to give description in the form of narration about a social events that is being researched (Slamet, 2019).

### IV. RESULT AND EXPLANATION

In the opening of personal selling by Cobb-Vantress, inc., many statements were all agree on how well Cobb-Vantress, inc. was doing the opening of their personal selling. The experts informants was also issued a statement that seems to support the key and supporting informants statement by giving an explanation of how an opening of personal selling was usually done. On the theory, many aspects of opening is important such as maintaining a good gesture, greetings and also the first impression of the seller. A salesperson might open with a smile and manage to reduce the possibilities of awkward situation (Jobber et al., 2019).

The need and problem identification step in a personal selling is a step which a salesperson could offer their different types of product to their customers based on what the customers need and the problem they have (Jobber et al., 2019). In this case, Cobb-Vantress, inc. asked several question to trigger several answers about their clients' need and problems. Key informants stated that Cobb-Vantress, inc. issued an open question so that the clients could give them more elaborative answers about their need and problems regarding their product. This statement also supported by the supporting informants, they were all agree that Cobb-Vantress, inc. always understand their need and problem during their personal selling. In addition, Cobb-Vantress, inc. also mentioned that they had done several research for the market's need and problem. Expert informant of this research also supporting this by mentioning what could a salesperson do to identify their customers' need and problem which was issuing a question that can stimulate the customers' into giving an open information about their need and problems that could be solved by a product or services offered by the salesperson (Jobber et al., 2019).

The presentation and demonstration of personal selling is the stage where the salesperson could present and demonstrate their product. There are several way involving a reference selling, trial orders and demonstration itself in this stage of personal selling (Jobber et al., 2019). Cobb-Vantress, inc. as mentioned by the key and supporting informants of this research referenced their past sales during the presentation followed by guarantee of product mortality or as in the theory product's reliability. The expert informant added that in reference selling a salesperson could also mentioned several big names that would influence the costumers into using the product such as celebrities or other people that used their product. This statement in line with the involvement of the past satisfied customers used by a salesperson in order to convince the new customers to use the product. Key and experts informant also stated that the product Cobb-Vantress, inc. could not be demonstrate which is a poultry product. This demonstration meant to reduce risk to prove the benefit of product and by that definition, key informant of this research stated that Cobb-Vantress, inc. did sometimes give their big clients a trial order while the supporting informants as their clients said that they were trusted the Cobb-Vantress, inc. product that they were never asked for a trial orders.

Dealing with objection as mentioned by the theory is a several way to reduce or even handling the customers' negative response regarding the product (Jobber et al., 2019). In this case as the key informant of this research stated, Cobb-Vantress, inc. usually answers their clients' objection. The statement also supported by the supporting

informants' statement regarding this topic by adding that Cobb-Vantress, inc. was handling well the clients' objection. Expert informants of this research also stated that a good salesperson should be sensitive towards their customers' response to their product. The theory on the other hand mentioned several ways to deal with the client's objection by listening, denying, question, agreeing, and also offer several persuasive solution with trial. There is also hidden objection which usually arise from the customers and the salesperson should be aware of it. In theory, the best response regarding the hidden objection is by asking several question in order to uncover the hidden objection from the customers. The key informant of this research also said that Cobb-Vantress, inc. always make the environment of discussion during their personal selling healthy by making them comfortable so that their clients could open up about the hidden objection from their clients.

In negotiation part of personal selling, the salesperson should be able to manage a good negotiation involving the concession for concession trading and the implementation of behavioural skills. From the interview that has been conducted for this research, researchers found that as mentioned by the key informants of this research, Cobb-Vantress, inc. negotiate with their clients about price, payment and more. Cobb-Vantress, inc. stated that win-win feeling between them and their clients is important especially the big clients and no small insignificant clients. As mentioned by the key informant of this research, Cobb-Vantress, inc. did not do concession for concession trading as they need to keep the market open for any potential clients. In addition to this, supporting informants had also stated that they as a clients of Cobb-Vantress, inc. usually negotiate about price in order to get the win-win feeling as also stated by the key informants of this research. While in the other hand expert informant of this research stated that concession for concession trading in the term of discount per quantity might be important to the number of sales made as in how many product sold. Expert informant of this research also added that the salesperson should manage a good negotiation for more effective sales. While it seems that the key informants and supporting informants gave the research a little explanation about the concession for concession trading, it probably happened during the sales closing while they elaborated more in the closing of the sales.

Closing the sale of personal selling is the step that is not usually initiate by the salesperson but it requires a skill and technique in which a salesperson might trigger this sales closing from asking the order, summarising the order to an action agreement (Jobber et al., 2019). The key informant of this research stated that the export manager of Cobb-Vantress, inc. would summarise the order and providing the document needed for the legal issue. They usually offered a discount with a certain condition that their clients need to fulfil such as payment agreement, delivering condition in order to prevent the fail in payment. This statement also supported by the supporting informants. The supporting informant 1 stated that they need to fulfil a certain condition in order to get a discount so that the payment would be secure. In this case, the negotiation seems to continue between Cobb-Vantress, inc. and the supporting informant 1 in which concession for concession trading done. The supporting informant 1 as one of the Cobb-Vantress, inc. clients wanted their product to be shipped from USA and not from New Zealand for health reasons in which the delivery cost might be raised in order to fulfil the client's need. On the other hand, supporting informant 2 seems to not having any problem and continue to action agreement. Expert informant of this research adding that a salesperson should make sure the safety of the product until it is delivered to the customer's hand. As stated by the expert informant of this research, everything has to be recapped from product variant, price, discount in order to get an agreement between salesperson and their customers and end the sale by signing a document of agreement and also securing the payment.

In this final stage of personal selling, Cobb-Vantress, inc. as mentioned by the key informant offered some kind of a reassurance services and assistances to their clients after the sales is made. The kind of follow up they do was by visiting their clients, sending them email or holding a meeting to get a feedback whether the customers is satisfied in order to maintain a long-term business relationship. The supporting informants also supporting the key informants statement by adding that Cobb-Vantress, inc. was able to manage a good response to their feedback. As concluded from the interview, Cobb-Vantress, inc. did not seem to delay their follow up call. As stated by the key informant of this research, they normally avoid it since delaying a follow up call could lead into an unhealthy business relationship. Supporting informant 2 also stated that Cobb-Vantress, inc. reacted so fast to their feedback after the sales. Some of the obstacles was usually around the shipment issue. Expert informant of this research follow-up calls is a responsibility of the salesperson to improve the customers' satisfaction. He also stated that delaying a follow-up calls might give a bad reputation not only on the salesperson but also the company as a whole. To conclude this interview

regarding the follow up topic, the researcher would like to take a look on the theory in which a follow-up call can reduce the risk of the customers being unsure or anxious on whether they made the right choice or not. It is also create a relationship between the company and their customers. A salesperson might delay a follow up call for a certain condition such as the follow up did not lead to a direct purchases.

## V. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Re-strategy Cobb-Vantress, inc. personal selling during the pandemic COVID-19 can be seen using the hybrid implementation of online and offline. It was shown by how the Cobb-Vantress, inc. went a field visit through their clients' farm along with doing a presentation by offline. The re-strategy used by Cobb-Vantress, inc. in carrying out personal selling can be reviewed through the personal selling process. The process that involving opening to the follow up calls of sales become a reference in this research. Several stages of the personal selling process was done by Cobb-Vantress, inc. by offline even it was in a pandemic situation where everyone had to be stayed at home to avoid the spread of COVID-19 virus among the society.

In this research, the researcher found that Cobb-Vantress, inc. had caried out their personal selling carefully. Using the hybrid way of communication which combined offline and online communication, Cobb-Vantress, inc. was able to do their personal selling in a pandemic situation without relieving the essence of personal selling. For example, Cobb-Vantress, inc. visited their clients in occasionally in order to run their personal selling effectively in the particular stages of personal selling process. As far as the data collected by the researcher in this research, the clients of Cobb-Vantress, inc. seemed to be satisfied with their service from the start of personal selling to the after sales stage which was follow-up. Although the situation might force the people from Cobb-Vantress, inc. to change their strategy and way of communicating in carrying out their personal selling, the research can be concluded with a conclusion that is in line with the nature of communication which is a dynamic relational process and can change at any time.

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