

# VIRAL MARKETING MESSAGE, CONSUMERS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS VIRAL MARKETING, COMPETITIVENESS ABILITY, AND BUSINESS PERFORMANCE

*by* Trixie Nova Bella Tandijaya

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## **VIRAL MARKETING MESSAGE, CONSUMERS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS VIRAL MARKETING, COMPETITIVENESS ABILITY, AND BUSINESS PERFORMANCE**

**Trixie Nova B<sup>1</sup>, Tandijaya<sup>1</sup>, Hatane Samuel<sup>2\*</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Business and Economics, Petra Christian University, Surabaya  
Email: d21200011@john.petra.ac.id<sup>1</sup>; <sup>2</sup>samy@petra.ac.id

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### **ABSTRACT**

Empowerment of technology and the use of digital media that were practiced through appropriate marketing strategies and tactics were able to make businesses survive in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. Viral marketing strategy was a low-cost effective marketing strategy for mass targeting. Powerful viral promotions could reach thousands of consumers, inspire them to buy certain branded products, and create a competitive advantage for businesses. This study took the Tanggulangin leather craft SMEs as one of the centers of the leather industry in Indonesia, with the research variables being viral marketing message, consumers' attitudes towards viral marketing, competitiveness ability, and business performance. The study was conducted on 235 respondents who met the requirements of the research provisions. The data were analyzed using SmartPLS 3. The results obtained were that viral marketing message had a direct positive effect on consumers' attitudes towards viral marketing, competitiveness ability, and business performance. Consumers' attitudes towards viral marketing had a direct positive effect on competitiveness ability and business performance. In addition, consumers' attitudes towards viral marketing partially mediated the relationship between viral marketing messages and competitiveness ability, and competitiveness ability partially mediated the relationship between consumers' attitudes towards viral marketing and business performance.

**Keywords:** Online marketing communication, viral marketing message, consumers' attitude toward viral marketing, competitiveness ability, business performance.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia had an impact on various economic sectors including the leathercraft industry, one of which is the Tanggulangin leather craft industry in Sidoarjo considered as small to medium in size. Nevertheless, according to the Ministry of Industry, Indonesia was in the sixth place as the country with the world's largest export value of leather products, footwear and leather goods, which reached US\$4.16 billion in January-September 2018, and increased by 6.28% by from the same period in 2017 (Bella, 2018). SMEs need to adapt during this pandemic so that the growth of the leather craft industry is able to keep contributing to the Indonesian economy in the future, especially from the great potential in the e-commerce sector. Agung Bayu Purwoko, the Principal Economist from Payment System Policy Department at Bank Indonesia, said that the value of e-commerce transactions increased due to an increase in mobile customers reaching 312 million, internet users reaching 175.4 million, and active social media users reaching 160 million (Antara & Setiawan, 2020). The data from Bank Indonesia shows that the e-commerce transactions increased from 40 million transactions (2018) to 80 million transactions (2019), and it reached 140 million in 2020. This growth must be utilized by SMEs in communicating products intensively by marketing products through digital marketing. According to Teten Masduki, the Minister for Cooperatives and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), there are currently around 8 million SMEs (13%) that join the digital ecosystem (Atutik & Umah, 2020). Digital optimization can be an effort to ensure that the wheels of the economy keep turning, because productive SMEs are the key to economic recovery. This is supported by Agus Suparmanto, the Minister of Trade, who stated that it is important for SMEs to join digital platforms (Antara & Setiawan, 2020).

Based on the data collected through interviews with Daniel Rohi as a Member of East Java DPRD's Commission B, the owners of the Tanggulangin leather craft SMEs in Sidoarjo have included a large part of the miscellaneous industry, whose total number of business types reaches 225 types with a total workforce of 74,455 people. This data shows that the Tanggulangin leather craft SMEs has considerable

potential to help the country's economic recovery after the pandemic. The development of technology and digital media allows for rapid business growth regardless of scale, one of which is through a viral marketing strategy. For example, it can be proved from the "*odading*" phenomenon, which suddenly went viral since the video of the seller named Mang Sholeh (Oleh) promoting with harsh and eccentric words and an angry tone (Bramasta, 2020). This typical Bandung snack is starting to get popular again after a video made by an Instagram artist, Ade Londok, about culinary reviews that went viral on social media (Travel, 2020).

Therefore, companies or business owners should change the use of (offline) conventional marketing media to online marketing media (Castronovo & Huang, 2012) to create viral messages for marketing. Viral marketing is an effective and low-cost marketing strategy for mass targeting (Putri & Ernawaty, 2019), not limited by geographic location and time, which has global reach potential compared to conventional communication (Goldsmith & Horowitz, 2006). Consumers engage and are often inspired to a persuasive marketing message (Bampo, Ewing, Mather, Stewart, & Wallace, 2008). Companies that have competitive advantages both from differentiation or cost can create and improve financial performance and brand performance better in the company (Ma, 2000).

Most studies related to viral marketing focus on messages and their impact on consumer attitudes and behavior. Zernigah and Sohail (2012) found that Pakistani consumers have positive attitudes towards viral marketing messages. Cruz and Fill (2008) examined the effectiveness of viral marketing campaigns on some of the prominent webmasters who led the development of many viral marketing activities in the United Kingdom. In addition, Putri dan Ernawaty (2019) also conducted research aimed at finding out the right viral marketing content for the Universal Health Coverage campaign in Indonesia. The two main variables that have been considered by previous researchers are Viral Marketing Messages (VM) and Consumers' Attitude Towards Viral Marketing (CATVM) but they have not taken into account their impact on business performance such as competitiveness ability (CA) or business performance (BP). In addition, the study on viral marketing has not provided a conceptual or practical framework that can simultaneously measure the relationship between the four aforementioned variables. In this research, the researchers seek to provide a conceptual model that measures the relationship between VM, CATVM, CA, and BP in a model that integrates four main theories, namely Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), Technology Organization Environmental (TOE), and Diffusion of Innovation (DOI). The theoretical framework is analyzed through the research design of consumer behavior of the Tanggulangin leather craft SMEs in Sidoarjo to provide empirical evidence of the impact of viral marketing strategies on competitiveness and business performance.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS

### Technology and Marketing

The multiple impacts of a business's marketing efforts can be carried out through a combination of technology and conventional marketing strategies and tactics. To connect this issue, the researchers refer to four main theories as to the basis for determining the research variables. Previous research applied and validated Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) introduced by Ajzen (1987) regarding the adaption of e-commerce mobile advertising by consumers (Bauer, Reichardt, Barnes, & Marcus, 2005; Guo, Zhao, Jin, & Zhang, 2010; Lee, Tsai, & Jih, 2006; Pavlou & Fygenson, 2006; Shen & Chen, 2008; M. M. Tsang, Ho, & Liang, 2004). The TPB concept is adopted to analyze the CATVM in which consumers' intentions to carry out various types of behavior can be predicted with high accuracy from the attitude toward behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Icek, 1991). To analyze individual intentions in adopting and using new information technology, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is used as a reference by focusing on perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease-of-use (EOU). According to Davis (1989), perceived usefulness is a person's level of belief using a certain technology will improve their performance while perceived ease-of-use refers to a person's level of confidence that information technology can be easily understood. Yang and Zhou (2011) examined young American consumers and found that perceived ease-of-use has a positive effect on consumers' intention to continue viral content, which substantiating the applicability of TAM for viral marketing through mobile devices. The level of technology adoption in the marketing efforts of a

business needs to be measured as well as its impact, especially on the competitiveness and performance of the business.

Tornatzky, Fleischer, and Chakrabarti (1990) used the Technology Organization Environmental (TOE) theory to examine how the decision to adopt a technological innovation is based on factors in the organizational and environmental context, as well as the characteristics of the technology. The company must consider business size, degree of centralization, formalization, complexity of the managerial structure, quality of human resources, and amount of available resource slack internally (Chau & Tam, 1997). The Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) clarifies the relationship between technological innovation adoption decisions and the company's capacity by predicting its impact on the attributes of relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability (Ahmad, Abu Bakar, & Ahmad, 2019). While relative advantage refers to how beneficial innovation to the organization, compatibility checks whether or not existing business processes, habits, and value systems align with the innovation. Complexity evaluates the perceived ease of use of an innovation whereas observability illuminates how visible its application to others and trialability refers to its testability. This research employs the TOE framework combined with several characteristics of DOI theory to investigate the impact of social media adoption on SME performance from the perspective of target consumer behavior based on TPB theory. This study uses the support of the owner/management of social media at the Tanggulangin leather craft SMEs in Sidoarjo as a proxy for the full organizational context.

#### Online Marketing Communication

Marketing instruments offer three basic marketing strategies, namely push, pull, and viral strategies (Wiedemann, 2007). In a push strategy, marketers lead consumers to distribute products and/or communicate them through social media content. In the pull strategy, marketers use a persuasive strategy and provide certain stimuli that do not directly sell to consumers. In viral strategy, information exchange occurs between consumers based on certain marketing content (push or pull). The last strategy is included in the concept of viral marketing, where one of the forms is electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Wiedemann, 2007). Advances in communication technology have become the field for the creation of various forms of viral marketing communication (Haryani & Motwani, 2015). Forwarding information to a large group of internet users can lead to widespread (viral) information dissemination, which is often known as eWOM (Meyliana, E. W., & Santoso, 2015). Viral marketing describes the phenomenon of the exponential sharing and dissemination of information jointly by consumers from marketers to stimulate and exploit the behavior of word-of-mouth (Van der Lans, van Bruggen, Eliashberg, & Wierenga, 2010). E-WOM is not part of commercial advertising because it is spread from consumers to consumers, not from companies to consumers. This type of message provides direct experience to consumers and affects the decisions of other consumers (Godes & Mayzlin, 2004; Park, Lee, & Han, 2007).

Social media is also seen as a tool to facilitate chain messages that are distributed from person to person. This chain message is the goal of viral marketing activities as a form of marketing promotion. Kaplan and Haenlein (2011) revealed that the determining factors in viral marketing are messenger, message content, and environment. These three factors will connect the message to potential consumers who will use the goods or services offered and recommend them to other consumers.

#### Viral Marketing Message

Marketing in the sense of viral creates an advertising message that seduce customers to ignite a chain of active activity in sharing the message from one customer to another (Palka, Pousttchi, & Wiedemann, 2009). VM is a strategy that encourages individuals to convey marketing messages to others and creates growth potential in terms of exposure and effect of these messages (Pandey, Sunaina, & Sridhar, 2012). The purpose of VM is to use consumer-to-consumer (or peer-to-peer) communication to disseminate information about a product or service so that the communication process becomes rapid (Krishnamurthy, 2001). Kaplan and Haenlein (2011) revealed that the determining factors in VM are messenger, message content, and environment. This research adopts the concept of VM based on research Zemigah and Sohail (2012) focusing on the probability level of a person's tendency to be

willing to spread viral marketing messages to their social networks. There are four dimensions in VM that affect consumer attitudes, namely:

1. Informativeness

In addition to making consumers aware of new products, the informative advertisement also informs consumers that these products are better than those offered by competitors (Saadeghvaziri & Hosseini, 2011). Informativeness refers to how marketing messages share or provide consumers with product related information to maximize their satisfaction (Waldt, Rebello, & Brown, 2009). Zernigah and Sohail (2012) provide three indicators of informativeness, namely informative (providing information relevant to the needs of the recipient), useful (providing useful information for the recipient), and important (providing important information for the recipient).

2. Entertainment

Entertainment is the extent to which a marketing message meets the viewer's need for pleasures, visually and emotionally (Ducoffe, 1996), which in turn will affect their attitude. This research uses entertainment indicators proposed by Zernigah & Sohail (2012) comprising the four indicators, namely entertaining (providing an entertaining message for the recipient), exciting (providing an exciting message for the recipient), and interesting (providing an interesting message for the recipient).

3. Source Credibility

MacKenzie & Lutz (1989) define source credibility in terms of the perceived openness and reliability of marketing messages. Various factors affect how credible an advertisement signals the credibility of the company and the messenger (Zernigah & Sohail, 2012). According to Ghane, Shokrizadeh, Omidvar, & Comyab (2014), message credibility depends on a number of factors including organizational credibility. This research uses the source credibility indicator proposed by Zernigah & Sohail (2012), namely trustworthiness (providing the level of credibility of the source of information for the recipient).

4. Irritation

In general, irritation is considered as any offensive message that may conflict with consumer values (Oh & Xu, 2003). Irritation is also defined as the use of marketing tactics that are distracting, offensive, insulting, or overly manipulative from a marketing perspective (Waldt *et al.*, 2009). Consumers can reject marketing messages coming from distracting advertisements. Moreover, consumers become irritated and show unfavorable attitude to manipulative marketing messages (Palka *et al.*, 2009). This research uses the irritation indicator proposed by Zernigah & Sohail (2012) comprising the four indicators, namely dangerous (providing a harmful message for the recipient), irritating (providing an irritating message for the recipient), annoying (providing an annoying message for the recipient) and misleading (providing a misleading message for the recipient).

### Consumers' Attitude toward Viral Marketing

In the literature of viral marketing, consumer attitude explains his/her overall evaluation regarding the desire to transmit viral marketing messages through mobile devices (Yang & Zhou, 2011). According to Wu and Wang (2011), attitude includes evaluation of likes and dislikes, emotions or feelings and behavioral attitudes. A mobile viral marketing campaign is successful when the attitude, the intent and behavior of a target recipient drive the forwarding of the marketing message to their friends and relatives (Yang & Zhou, 2011). In addition, it is also successful when individual consumers possess strong desire to forward the message to hundreds of other individual consumers. Zernigah & Sohail (2012) measure the same concept of attitude through consumers' reactions affected by informativeness, entertainment, source credibility, and irritation. The two indicators measuring attitude in this research assess consumers' perception on how useful and effective the marketing tools used by the business owners of Tanggulangin leather craft industry in Sidoarjo.

1. Competitiveness Ability

According to Rainer Feurer and Kazem Chaharbaghi (1994), competitiveness is the ability to persuade customers to choose their offerings over existing alternatives. Porter (1985) defines CA through how defensive a company's position relative to its competitors, which strongly differentiates between the two

(Tracey, Vonderembse, & Lim, 1999). Helm (2000) states that the goal of viral marketing is to maximize the reach. This criterion is significant in achieving competitiveness through viral marketing messages. Reach is an important element of excellence for e-business companies (P. Evans & Wurster, 1999). Alkharabsheh, Alsarayreh, Rumman and Al Farajat (2011) provide 10 CA indicators, namely information spreading competitive advantage (effectiveness of advertising dissemination), rapid implementation of new programs (speed of dissemination of the latest marketing promotion programs), location-based competitive advantage (advantage of information dissemination locations), added value (impact of virtual interaction and competitive pricing on the added value of products/services), comprehensiveness of product specification (completeness of product/service information), naturally encourage promotion (natural ability to encourage product promotion), efficiency (dissemination of advertising messages or services efficiently), product-market fit (promoting products based on the interests of the recipients).

#### Business Performance

A company achieves business performance in proportion to achieving its production, human resources, marketing, and financial goals. Business performance can be seen from a financial and non-financial perspective. In addition, based on recommendations from several researchers (N. Evans, 2005; Murphy & Callaway, 2004; Panigyrakis & Theodoridis, 2007) both financial and non-financial measures should use growth, efficiency, profit, reputation, and personal goals of the owner to measure performance as a measurement of the overall performance of SMEs. This research adopts business performance measurements in Ahmad, Abu Bakar, & Ahmad (2019), namely sales (number of transactions and sales volume), customer service (satisfaction with service quality), and brand equity (customer involvement and devaluation of other brand alternatives).

#### Hypothesis Development

Previous study (Majedul Huq, 2015; Tsang *et al.*, 2004) found that VM significantly affect CATVM (Tsang *et al.*, 2004) through all its dimension (entertainment, credibility, informativeness, and incentive). Zernigah and Sohail (2012) also found a significant positive relationship between VM (entertainment, credibility, and informativeness) and CATVM. Based on previous research, it is only the irritation dimension that has a negative effect on CATVM whose measurements in this research are adapted into positive statements. We therefore hypothesize that:  
Hypothesis 1: VM have an effect on CATVM.

VM can spread any message to millions of people in a short span of time in an effective way (Haryani & Motwani, 2015). The research conducted by D. Tsang & Qun (2015) on two European online game companies, namely Jagex Games Studio and Rovio Entertainment, shows how viral marketing messages affect the company's competitive advantage in maintaining relationships with end-users.  
Hypothesis 2: VM have an effect on CA.

VM efficiently boosts BP exponentially through the engagement between buyers and sellers (Dobele, Lindgreen, Beverland, Vanhamme, & van Wijk, 2007). The adoption of the concept of mobile advertising (via viral marketing messages) that has a good message consistency will have a greater effect on the company's business performance (sales) and also have a good frequency of reach as well as affect different exposures to the target audience compared to traditional advertising (such as TV or print advertising) (Majedul Huq, 2015). VM increases awareness and adoption of a product or service across a wide network of buyers through peer-to-peer communication (Xiong & Hu, 2010).  
Hypothesis 3: VM have an effect on BP.

VM describes any strategy that "encourages individuals to forward a marketing message" to others, "creates the potential for exponential growth in message exposure or influence". Like viruses, "viral marketing strategies take advantage of rapid multiplication to blow messages to thousands and even millions of people" (Pandey *et al.*, 2012). Mobile viral marketing is the optimal approach to expand the reach and influence of promotional messages at little or no additional cost to advertisers (Pousttchi & J. demann, 2007). Consumers engage and are often inspired to a persuasive marketing message (Bampo *et al.*, 2008). The effect of consumers' attitude towards viral marketing on competitiveness



ability is a part of the current exploratory research because the researchers try to connect two variables from different disciplines (consumers' attitude towards viral marketing from online marketing communication and the competitive ability of strategic company management).

Hypothesis 4: CATVM has an effect on CA.

Informativeness has an effect on CATVM because it helps them make purchasing decisions (Tsang *et al.*, 2004). Entertainment services add customers' value and increase customers' loyalty so that it leads to positive consumers' attitudes (Saadeghvaziri & Hosseini, 2011). The research conducted by Choi and Rifon (2002) found that company credibility has a direct positive effect on attitudes toward advertising, brands, and purchase intentions. The research conducted by Esmailpour and Aram (2016) on mobile phone consumers (Samsung, Sony, Nokia, LG and iPhone) in the city of Bushehr (Iran) shows that the attractiveness and credibility of the message source influence consumers' attitude towards the brand. Although one of the measurements of business performance is brand equity (Aaker, 1996). This research seeks to explore the relationship between consumers' attitudes and business performance by including other company performance measures, such as sales performance and customer service.

Hypothesis 5: CATVM has an effect on BP.

Molina-Azorín, Tarí, Pereira-Moliner, López-Gamero, & Pertusa-Ortega (2015) state that competitive advantage is an ability obtained through the characteristics and resources of a company to have higher business performance than other companies in the same industry or market. Porter's competitive strategic model shows that competitive advantage improves a company's financial health (such as profit, margin, and return on investment) and market health (such as market share and sales) compared to its competitors (Santos-Vijande, López-Sánchez, & Trespalacios, 2012; Weerawardena, O'Cass, & Julian, 2006). The research conducted by Alkharabsheh *et al.*, (2011) concluded that online tourism promotion using viral marketing messages helps to disseminate information for tourist offers in Jordan, and this type of promotion helps to increase the competitiveness of tourism companies, such as the credibility of information for tourism offers in Jordan, and also provides adequate information needs for tourism programs in Jordan for the purchase decision by the client.

Hypothesis 6: Competitiveness ability has an effect on business performance.

VM has significant effect on CATVM in which it has been empirically proven in several previous studies (De Reyck & Degraeve, 2003; M. M. Tsang *et al.*, 2004; Zabadi, Shura, & Elsayed, 2012). The effect of consumers' attitude towards viral marketing on competitiveness ability has also been demonstrated to be empirically significant in several previous studies (Bampo *et al.*, 2008; Pandey *et al.*, 2012; Pousttchi & Wiedemann, 2007). Some of these studies do not provide a theoretical framework for the purely mediating role of the consumers' attitude towards viral marketing, thus in this research, the mediation role is analyzed using a statistical approach.

Hypothesis 7: Consumers' attitude towards viral marketing mediates the effect of viral marketing on competitiveness ability.

In several previous studies (Bampo *et al.*, 2008; Pandey *et al.*, 2012; Pousttchi & Wiedemann, 2007), it has been empirically proven that CATVM has a significant effect on competitiveness ability. The effect of competitiveness ability on business performance has also been proven empirically significant in several previous studies (Choi & Rifon, 2002; Esmailpour & Aram, 2016; Saadeghvaziri & Hosseini, 2011; Tsang *et al.*, 2004). Some of these studies do not provide a theoretical framework for the purely mediating role of competitiveness ability variable, thus in this research, the test of the mediation role is analyzed using a statistical approach.

Hypothesis 8: Competitiveness ability mediates the effect of consumers' attitude towards viral marketing on business performance.

#### RESEARCH METHOD

A causal quantitative approach is used to analyze the relationship between VM, CATVM, CA, and BP in the context of the Tanggulangin leather craft SMEs in Sidoarjo. The research population includes all consumers of the Tanggulangin leather craft SMEs in Sidoarjo (are social media users who have seen SME marketing advertisements). The sample was selected purposively with the qualifications of

respondents who had only seen marketing advertisements from these SME vendors. The majority of consumers are generation Z (born 1997-2012) and the millennial generation (born 1981-1996) (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2019). Based on the age and generation range, the survey conducted is appropriate because spreading viral marketing messages is more suitable for the younger generation who often absorb information through social media. In addition, the composition of the Indonesian population based on the majority generation is filled by generation Z and millennials, which were around 144.31 million people (53.81%) of the total population of Indonesia in 2019 (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2019), so this provides a large and potential market opportunity for SMEs focus.

With limited access and privacy of consumer data, the researchers used the aided recall method by providing online promotional posters that were often used by SME vendors in the main survey. This method was applied to two groups of respondents, namely fellow researchers who met the criteria and students of Petra Christian University in the second to fourth year. The specific sampling criteria are:

1. Respondents have seen the marketing message of the Tanggulangin leather craft SMEs in Sidoarjo at least from the design experiment listed in the survey (photo of SME marketing advertisement).
2. Priority respondents are students, followed by the general public (company workers, businessmen, housewives, etc.) based on references from those who have filled out the questionnaire (snowball technique).

Data were collected using the mix-methods (qualitative-quantitative-qualitative) method to increase the generalizability of the research findings. The main survey resulted in 235 respondents whose opinions were processed through multivariate analysis through PLS-SEM (Partial Least Square) using SmartPLS 3 software.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Respondents' Profile**

This research involved 70.21% of the female respondents and 29.76% of the male respondents. The majority of respondents aged 18-24 years at 68.09%, 25-34 years at 22.55%, followed by 35-44 years at 7.23%, under 18 years only 1 person and above 44 years only 4 people. The majority of respondents' occupations are students (58.72%), followed by company employees (22.13%) and businessmen (11.06%). The rest of the respondents' occupations are housewives, counselors, lecturers, teachers, freelancers and architects.

### **Data Analysis**

#### ***PLS-SEM Measurement Model***

Based on the convergent validity test, a viral marketing message must contain information that is up to date, latest, and relevant to the preferences and interests of the target SME consumer. Furthermore, marketing messages must provide the perception that the information provided is exclusive, and only given to selected members of the SME community, so it is not given to everyone. SME marketing messages should avoid giving the impression that SMEs are selling their products (only selling content). SMEs should avoid giving marketing messages that seem to force the target consumer to immediately make a purchase. Then, SMEs must also ensure that every marketing message contains an element of testimonials from its consumers. Furthermore, SME marketing messages should avoid spamming or not uploading too much content at the same time, and always appear on all social media platforms used at the same time. SMEs must schedule the release of marketing content on every existing social media platform so that consumers are not distracted and can receive it well. In addition, SME marketing messages should come from trusted sources of information, namely data from organizations or influencers who have a good reputation and are known to the public as having an interest in leather products.

The indicator of consumers' attitude toward viral marketing with the highest factor loading was CATVM5 (0.831), namely, the respondents liked marketing advertisements through digital media (mobile phones, social media, email, etc.). The indicator with the lowest factor loading was CATVM1 (0.689), which means that respondents did not use digital media (mobile phones, social media, email, etc.) to access viral messages about a brand. The indicator of competitiveness ability with the highest



factor loading was CA8 (0.845), where the respondents considered that viral online promotions were naturally relevant to the way SME consumers access information about products/services and CA10 (0.845), which indicates that the respondents also considered that viral online promotions allowed SME consumers focus on products/services that interest them. The indicator with the lowest factor loading was CA4, where the respondents considered that viral online promotions did not increase the added value of products or services from SMEs. The business performance indicator with the highest factor loading was BP3 (0.831), which indicates that respondents were satisfied with the products or services provided by X SME. The indicator with the lowest factor loading was BP4 (0.775), which means that respondents were less involved or participated intensely with SMEs. This measure of business performance is supported by the research results based on secondary data from the Tanggulangin leather craft SMEs (such as *Sendy Leather*, *Zumma Bags*, *Valqo*, and *Elnazbags*) from e-commerce platforms. The AVE value of all variables was more than equal to 0.50 so that it had passed the convergent validity test. The variance in this variable/construct can be obtained more than the measurement error. The variance in question is the square of the standard deviation of the respondents' answers.

#### ***Discriminant Validity***

The results show that there was no item smaller than the value of the other variable item, hence overall, it was valid because it met the requirements. The Fornell-Larcker criterion test was considered to have passed as seen from the AVE root value or the Fornell-Larcker Criterion value for each construct was greater than its correlation with other constructs. The results show that the entire AVE root value of each variable was greater than the correlation value. Therefore, the variables of this research as a whole had met the requirements of discriminant validity.

#### ***Reliability Test***

The Cronbach's alpha value was more than equal to 0.70, which means that the constructs showed the consistency of the research results and all of these constructs passed this test. The composite reliability value of all constructs passed this test because it was above 0.70. These results indicate that the construct of this research model was reliable.

#### **PLS-SEM Structural Model**

##### ***Collinearity Statistics***

The results of the collinearity test show that there was no multicollinearity in the research variables with a value of variance inflation factor (VIF) below five (Hair, J. F., Hult, G. T. M., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, 2014) so that the test of the significance of the structural effect between variables could be conducted.

##### ***The PLS Predictive Model's Accuracy and Relevance***

By referring to the value of the coefficient of determination (R-Square), the combined effect of the variables VM, CATVM, and CA accurately predicted changes in BP by 49.6%. In addition, the effect of the VM variable accurately predicted changes in the CATVM variable by 48.8%. The combination of the effect of VM and CATVM variables accurately predicted changes in CA by 56.9%. The Q-Square value above zero indicates that each independent variable in this research was relevant in predicting the dependent variable.

##### ***Significance Effect Test***

The t-statistics value of VM→CATVM was 17.301 (H1 was accepted), which means that VM significantly influenced CATVM. The t-statistics value of VM→CA was 4.101 (H2 was accepted), which means that the influence of VM on CA was significant. The t-statistics value of VM→BP was 4.175 (H3 was accepted), substantiating VM's impact on BP. The t-statistics value of CATVM→CA was 8.770 (H4 was accepted), concluding that CATVM significantly affected CA. The t-statistics value of CATVM→BP was 2.739 (H5 was accepted), proving the significant effect of CATVM on BP. The t-statistics value of CA→BP was 2.363 (H6 was accepted), which means that CATVM had a significant effect on BP. Overall, the six hypotheses had a positive relationship and a significant effect based on the value of t-statistics, which was above 1.96. In addition, based on the t-statistics, the biggest influence

was on viral marketing messages <sup>1</sup> consumers' attitudes toward viral marketing. The smallest effect among the six hypotheses was on competitiveness ability on business performance.

The indirect effect value of  $VM \rightarrow CATVM \rightarrow CA$  indicates that CATVM mediated the relationship of  $VM \rightarrow CA$  with the path coefficient value of 0.387, which implies that there was a positive relationship. The t-statistics value of  $8.043 > 1.96$  and p-value was  $0.000 < 0.05$  (H7 was accepted), which means that CATVM significantly mediated the relationship of  $VM \rightarrow CA$  but this mediating role was partial because the direct effect of VM on CA was significant. The indirect effect value of  $CATVM \rightarrow CA \rightarrow BP$  indicates that CA mediated the relationship of  $CATVM \rightarrow BP$  with the path coefficient value of 0.108, which implies that there was a positive relationship. The t-statistics value of  $2.207 > 1.96$  and p-value was  $0.027 < 0.05$  (H8 was accepted), which means that CA significantly mediated the relationship of  $CATVM \rightarrow BP$  but this mediating role was partial because the direct effect of CATVM on BP significant.

## DISCUSSION

First, VM had a significant effect on CATVM. This finding is supported by previous studies (Majedul Huq, 2015; M. M. Tsang *et al.*, 2004; Zabadi *et al.*, 2012). Second, the impact of VM on CA was profound, providing an empirical evidence to previous studies (Bampo *et al.*, 2008; Pousttchi & Wiedemann, 2007). Third, VM is also found to significantly affect BP therefore substantiating previous related research (Dobele *et al.*, 2007; Wu & Wang, 2011). Fourth, the findings of Bampo *et al.* (2008) and Pousttchi and Wiedemann (2007) therefore corroborating our own finding on the impact CATVM on CA. Fifth, similar to previous studies (Choi & Rifon, 2002; Esmaeilpour & Aram, 2016), this study also found that CATVM significantly affected BP. Sixth, CA evidently affected BP thus confirming the finding of previous study (Ma, 2000; Molina-Azorin *et al.*, 2015).

Seventh, CATVM significantly mediated the impact of VM on CA, but this impact is only partial. The results of this research were supported by several previous studies that had empirically proven that viral marketing messages had a significant effect on consumers' attitudes towards viral marketing (De Reyck & Degraeve, 2003; Tsang *et al.*, 2004; Zabadi *et al.*, 2012). The effect of consumers' attitude towards viral marketing on competitiveness ability had also been demonstrated to be empirically significant in several previous studies (Bampo *et al.*, 2008; Pandey *et al.*, 2012; Pousttchi & Wiedemann, 2007). Eighth, CA partially mediated the impact of CATVM on BP. The results of this research were supported by several previous studies that had empirically proven that consumers' attitude towards viral marketing had a significant effect on competitiveness ability (Bampo *et al.*, 2008; Pandey *et al.*, 2012; Pousttchi & Wiedemann, 2007). The influence of competitiveness ability on business performance had also been proven empirically significant in several previous studies (Choi & Rifon, 2002; Esmaeilpour & Aram, 2016; Saadeghvaziri & Hosseini, 2011; Tsang *et al.*, 2004).

## CONCLUSION

The conclusion contains a summary of the results of hypothesis testing that have been designed and tested. There are six conclusions in accordance with the number of hypotheses. The conclusions of this research are as follows:

1. VM have a significant positive effect on CATVM. In other words, the more respondents feel that VM are not irritating, the more positive attitudes will be regarding the message.
2. VM have a significant positive effect on CA. In other words, the more respondents feel that VM are not irritating, it will further increase the ability of SMEs to compete.
3. VM have a significant positive effect on BP. This means that the more respondents feel that viral marketing messages are not irritating, it will further improve the business performance of SMEs.
4. CATVM has a significant positive effect on CA. In other words, the more positive the attitude of the respondents, the more they will increase the ability of SMEs to compete.
5. CATVM has a significant positive effect on BP. In other words, the more positive the attitude of the respondents, the BP of the SMEs will be better more.
6. CA has a significant positive effect on BP. In other words, the more respondents feel that SMEs have the ability to compete better than their competitors do, it will further improve the business performance of SMEs.

7. CATVM partially mediates the relationship between VM and CA. In other words, although consumers are exposed to VM, it is not always accompanied by an increase in CA from the use of VM tools, unless consumer attitudes are formed in a positive way regarding VM.
8. CA partially mediates the relationship between CATVM and BP. In other words, although positive consumer attitudes are not always accompanied by an increase in BP unless SMEs have a significant visible CA.

### **Suggestions**

Suggestions are divided based on objectives, namely academic purposes (theoretical) and managerial purposes (practical).

#### **Suggestions for academicians**

1. The context of this research is a niche (in this research, it is SMEs) so that further research is expected to use literature with a specific scope.
2. There is a need for empirical research related to specific variables, such as peer-to-peer recommendation (Krishnamurthy, 2001), copywriting techniques that are more directed to storytelling (Pulizzi, 2012; Rodriguez, 2020) compared to conventional methods in the fields of brand promotion, or other variables, such as user-generated content (Müller & Christandl, 2019), which has a significant effect on brand response (awareness, interest, desire, action).
3. These variables are in the fields of content marketing literature and the main current concern of the public and businesspeople because consumers have lost trust in the brand (including content managed by the brand itself) (Nielsen, 2015).

#### **Suggestions for practice**

1. The owners of the Tanggulangin leather craft SMEs in Sidoarjo are advised to pay more attention to the presence in digital media with the right marketing strategies and tactics so that in addition to scaling up the business of SMEs, they are able to make SMEs also survive during the current pandemic.
2. Digital media can be focused on SMEs to spread viral marketing messages or reach potential consumers are Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook.
3. SME marketing advertisements can use storytelling, so as to create an emotional bond between the message reader and the content of the SME marketing message. For example, SMEs can make a story related to a movement campaign in the form of infographics or videos, such as #BanggaBuatanIndonesia.
4. SMEs can also explore more about their buyer personas in more detail.
5. From the technical side of using social media, especially Instagram, SMEs can pay attention to the content upload schedule and take advantage of the carousel post feature.
6. Lastly, in terms of e-commerce utilization, SMEs can better manage the categories of leather products they have with the built-in features provided by e-commerce.

#### **Suggestions for further research**

1. Variable Operational Definitions: Questionnaire items need to be defined practically or contextually.
2. To reduce opinion bias from filling out questionnaires when conducting a survey, further research needs to recruit respondents who have direct experience as consumers and see marketing advertisements for the leather craft SMEs.

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