

Consumer Relations through Digital Communication Strategy: A Case Study of After-Sales Service At Pt. Bardi Solusi Otomasi

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Abstract:

This research was conducted to analyze the digital communication strategy implemented by PT Bardi Solusi Otomasi in providing after-sales services to consumers who have purchased Bardi products. In the initial observation, researchers noticed an increased focus on services delivered to consumers through digital communication in the context of after-sales. The qualitative research method, relying on observation and interviews, was applied to collect data from PT Bardi Solusi Otomasi and consumers who have placed repeat orders. In relation to Computer-Mediated Communication and Customer Relationship Management, the research results indicated that the company could address problems and maintain consumer relations effectively through the Forum Diskusi channel.

Keywords: Company digital communication, Computer-mediated communication, After-sales service, Smart Home.

1. Introduction

Communication continues to play a crucial role in every business sector, including the business realm. One vulnerable aspect within it is establishing communication with clients or consumers. Therefore, a company operating in the business sector will prioritize serving its audience, especially in after-sales service. Concerning this informational service, it is directed towards fostering consumer relations and maintaining a good relationship. Consequently, the communication system in providing customer service is crucial and necessary to facilitate consumers in operating purchased goods. Communication patterns greatly assist in achieving customer satisfaction and serve as a guide in after-sales service during the interaction between sellers and buyers in the transaction process.

After-sales service is vital for consumers, as it becomes crucial once the product is purchased. The rapid growth of information and communication technology, such as smart home technology in Indonesia, necessitates manufacturers to develop their products according to consumer needs and changing tastes in close succession. As a result, if a product experiences damage within a specific category, many buyers of that particular product find it challenging to repair it due to the unavailability of spare parts (Astari Sekarwati & Suparto, 2020).

Currently, society's dependence on Smart Home products based on connectivity with smart devices or smartphones contributes to increased orders for various Smart Home devices. This indirectly intensifies competition in the Smart Home business, where companies compete wisely by offering various cutting-edge products and the latest technological innovations. After-sales service is a key component in creating customer satisfaction alongside the rapid progress of Smart Home products, and the fierce competition prompts more manufacturers to participate in fulfilling customer desires and preferences.

To reinforce this, the author examines several supporting research results. Previous research, such as "Communication Strategy in After-Sales Service Maintenance Reminder at PT. Toyota Agung Bengkulu" (Annisa Sabilidina Mulyadi, 2019), assists consumers in vehicle service reminders where many consumers tend to forget. Furthermore, (Safira, 2020) titled "Marketing Strategy of Honda Delima for Customer Loyalty at Honda Dealerships" offering special promotions to customers who regularly service their vehicles makes them interested in returning for service. Including the research on the implementation of Computer-Mediated

Communication in the Waste Bank Mall Application (Ichwan, 2022) shows that waste bank consumers face difficulties in finding the position of the mobile carts to manage waste, making it challenging for them to deposit exchangeable waste. However, with the application, consumers can be aware of the current conditions when they want to exchange their waste, making it easier to participate.

Referring to the above description, one company that pays special attention to after-sales service is PT. Bardi Solusi Otomasi. The company sees maintaining relationships with customers as essential, as it is crucial for businesses to build and maintain good relationships with customers by communicating effectively. PT. Bardi Solusi Otomasi also recognizes that in the business world, the focus should not only be on product development. Although product innovation is important, building and maintaining communication in after-sales service are equally crucial. In relation to this, one way to maintain communication with customers in providing after-sales service is through discussion forums. The forums managed by 'Super Admins' (administrators) are quite active in responding to all questions asked by consumers facing difficulties.

Observing the digital communication practices conducted by the company, PT. Bardi Solusi Otomasi has established service centers in more than 30 cities across Indonesia. Furthermore, the author is interested in exploring the company's digital communication strategy and how customers who have made a second purchase of Bardi products use the internet to receive after-sales service.

2. Materials and Methods

Starting with a qualitative approach, the author focuses on how PT. Bardi Solusi Otomasi implements digital communication strategies in providing after-sales service to consumers. The author employs a case study method to delve into various aspects of the selected analytical units (Sutton, 2015). The research subjects consist of seven informants: Ari Suciadi, Hendrik Wijaya, and Buddy Dharmawan (representatives from the Bardi manufacturer), Tinus Setiawan, Fariz Ramadhan, Bayu, and Haydar (enthusiasts of Smart Home products).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Digital Communication Strategy in After-Sales Service

The digital communication strategy implemented by PT. Bardi Solusi Otomasi is a crucial aspect undertaken by the company as the holder of the Bardi brand. This is a fitting innovation as a form of service to Bardi consumers, enabling them to easily resolve issues in using Bardi products. This is articulated by Hendrik Wijaya (product manager) as follows:

“In essence, the main foundation for providing after-sales service or warranty from Bardi is an educational initiative for consumers so that they understand and acquire knowledge about smart homes”.

In addition to digital services through the website, discussion forums, and virtual showrooms that are provided, Bardi's warranty network is also extensive, covering all major cities in more than 38 provinces. Therefore, consumers in need of service do not have to come to the service center located in central Jakarta.

Besides our service center, we also have something called Home Care Implementary. For consumers facing issues at home, if they have reported it and the Bardi technician team has checked it, either through 24-hour WhatsApp or Virtual Showroom, there will be a Bardi technician team coming to the house for a direct check. And if indeed a damage is found, and it's our fault, we will replace it immediately without charge, and the checking fee is also free.

In addition to the website and discussion forum, yes, the discussion forum is truly intended for educating consumers. Our team, especially Mr. Buddy as the forum administrator, will always respond to every question given to us. Customers can ask anything through this discussion forum. In addition to the discussion forum used for education, we also use social media through TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram to educate customers about Bardi products.

The statement aligns with the channel in the Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) theory by utilizing applications such as the website and discussion forums to provide digital communication services in its after-sales service. According to (Philip Kotler, 2012), customer satisfaction is an expression obtained after consumers receive a service. The author observes that Bardi product consumers may have higher expectations because Bardi not only provides standard service center services, unlike other companies.

Similarly, the Affiliate Team and Content Creator under Ari Suciadi have applied the assumptions of the Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) theory (Adrian Meier and Leonard Reinecke, 2020) according to the Feature channel. By utilizing CMC channel features, communication through WhatsApp and Google Meet enables consumers to easily contact Bardi's technicians, ensuring a response rather than an automated system.

In the CMC channel, it is explained that the interaction occurring in digital after-sales service involves two-way interactive communication (active usage), allowing consumers and technicians to openly discuss the issues faced by consumers.

Regarding the provided Discussion Forum, the author sees this channel as an added value, as mentioned on the official website <https://forum.bardi.co.id/> (PT. Bardi Solusi Otomasi, 2020). By not outsourcing the management of the forum to a third party, the content creator section (Ari Suciadi) directly manages the forum, integrating it with the company's official website. The accompanying images can clarify the previous description.

Upon further examination, the utilization of the discussion forum aligns with the assumptions of the Computer-Mediated Communication theory regarding the utilization of channels (Adrian Meier and Leonard Reinecke, 2020), namely Features, Interaction, and Message.

The services provided in the Features include a Chat menu that is easily accessible to all users. The interaction applied refers to the Source-Receiver-Relationship: one to one, one to many, and many to one. In practice, interactions in the discussion forum flow in various directions, allowing users to communicate personally with forum admins. Users can also interact with other users and admins, posing questions that can be answered by anyone. Admins, in turn, introduce topics that can be discussed simultaneously by all forum users.



Figure 1: Discuss with the discussion forum admin

Not confined to the website alone, Bardi also provides digital after-sales services that can be easily accessed through smartphones. Responding to the assumptions of the Computer-Mediated Communication theory (Edwi Arief Sosiawan dan Rudi Wibowo, 2018), it is emphasized that the application of CMC has evolved not only on computer devices but has extended to smartphones. The affiliate team and content creators can promptly identify issues with Bardi products.

Ultimately, consumer relations and satisfaction will naturally form as Bardi's products are believed to align with the provided services. Therefore, through customer and consumer satisfaction, it is certain that consumers will make repeat purchases of Bardi products.

In this regard, the forum discussion admin demonstrates differentiation to create a distinct impression for consumers utilizing the digital communication services provided by Bardi. Here, consumers can create an account to ask questions and engage in discussions with other Bardi product users facing similar issues. Consumer experiences are further reinforced by the excerpts from the following interview results:

“What I know is, for other similar products, they usually only provide call center and service center services. Even if they respond to WhatsApp, it's usually a bot or system. But with Bardi, from what I know, all the processes are handled directly by the admin. So, the responses come from the Bardi staff team directly, without using bots. The only exception might be when they distribute service satisfaction surveys, they use bots for that because it's automated”.

3.2 Customer Relations

Overall, customer satisfaction and good customer relations are crucial factors in building a sustainable and successful business. This creates a favorable environment for business growth, positive reputation, and

customer loyalty, ultimately contributing to the performance and success of the company.

One of the interviewees, Fariz Ramadhan, responded to having faced challenges in using Bardi products, which were successfully resolved through the available digital communication services. Satisfied with the experience, the interviewee decided to trust Bardi as a smart home product and intends to make a repeat purchase. In the end, maintaining good relationships with customers to encourage repeat purchases is more important than simply targeting new buyers (Syabania & Rosmawani, 2021).

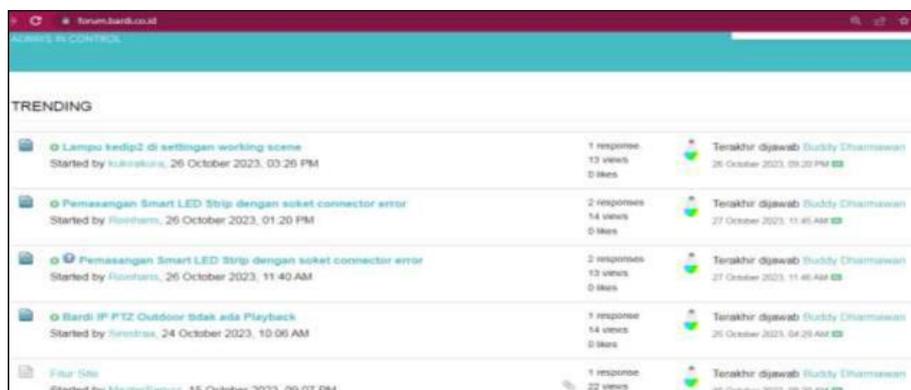


Figure 2: Bardi Discussion Forum

Efforts to build relationships have shown positive results. Another interviewee, Bayu Arifa Aziz, utilized the WhatsApp service to contact Bardi technicians, leading to the replacement of a new CCTV product without the need to visit a service center. In this case, the author observes that Bardi employs a short communication channel approach (Adrian Meier and Leonard Reinecke, 2020), such as a branded application (WhatsApp), followed by a direct video call service with Bardi technicians. This interaction establishes the directionality of interaction, where the relationship between the consumer and the producer forms relational characteristics of individual partners. Bardi's developed application, WhatsApp, provides services 24/7. From the observations, the chat responses to consumers are not from bots or robots but from the Bardi team itself, with a maximum response time of 30 minutes to ensure that consumer issues are resolved. Therefore, optimizing digital communication in after-sales service requires a proactive approach focused on providing added value to customers.

Upon further examination, the author found that interactions in after-sales digital communication services occur synchronously, where information or communication exchanges happen in real-time, such as WA 24 hours, Technical Inquiry (Google Meet), and the Call Center. In asynchronous communication, interaction or information exchange does not happen immediately or simultaneously, as seen in the Bardi discussion forum www.forum.bardi.co.id and email contact info@bardi.co.id. In the discussion forum, based on interview results, the requirements of CRM Theory (Clow & Baack, 2018) are met through the utilization of the Trending feature in the Forum Discussion to extract consumer databases related to complaints/needs. Thus, the output of the established consumer relationship reveals the presence of strong tie characteristics, where Bardi's technical team will continue to communicate with consumers facing issues until the problems are resolved.

Another interesting aspect that can be presented in this article is the delivery of messages through the website, which is a crucial aspect to ensure that consumers receive relevant, clear, and easily understandable information regarding the issues they face. The way messages are structured and presented includes one-click reactions, text, images, sound, and video in WA 24 hours and Google Meet in Technical Inquiry. As a result, the social presence obtained by Bardi consumers is a social interaction in the digital world, resembling a discussion at the Bardi service center without the need for a direct visit.

In the end, the development of communication technology in the digital era plays a significant role in its impact on society. Changes in society are influenced by the advancement of communication technology itself. The dependence is also evident in the ongoing presence of technology to this day. Unconsciously, technology also creates a cultural product known as digital culture. Specifically, in the context of technological development and its influence on society, this reality also becomes a tangible part of technological determinism introduced by McLuhan.

4. Conclusion

Educational value is the main emphasis directed towards both consumers and potential customers to understand the advantages, features, and benefits of each product. This section reaffirms the answer to the formulated problem, stating that PT. Bardi Solusi Otomasi has implemented concepts in Computer Mediated Communication and Customer Relationship Management, aiming to make consumers loyal and more preferred than competitor products. The utilization of communication technology becomes an after-sales service that can assist consumers facing issues with purchased products. This facilitates consumers by cutting the bureaucratic service center chain in a more streamlined manner without the need for direct visits.

5. References

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