

## Understanding The Impact Of Covid-19 Pandemic On Corporate Branding Strategies

Mia Christy Patricia

Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Ekonomi Kasih Bangsa

Cahyatih Kumandang

Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Ekonomi Kasih Bangsa

Korespondensi penulis: [Mia@stiekasihbangsa.ac.id](mailto:Mia@stiekasihbangsa.ac.id)

**Abstract.** This research aims to investigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on corporate branding strategies. Employing a phenomenological approach, the study delves into the lived experiences of corporate stakeholders amidst the pandemic. The sampling technique involves purposive sampling of corporate representatives and marketing professionals renowned for their expertise in branding strategies. Data collection is conducted through in-depth interviews, allowing for a rich understanding of participants' perceptions and experiences. Thematic analysis is employed to identify patterns, trends, and emergent themes from the interview data. Preliminary findings indicate shifts in branding strategies towards digital platforms, heightened emphasis on brand authenticity, and a reevaluation of brand messaging in response to the evolving socio-economic landscape influenced by the pandemic.

**Keywords:** COVID-19 pandemic, Branding, Strategies

### INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered unprecedented challenges across various sectors, compelling organizations to reassess their strategies and adapt swiftly to the evolving landscape. Among the critical areas affected is corporate branding, as companies navigate through uncertainties and endeavor to maintain their relevance and resonance with stakeholders. This qualitative research aims to delve into the intricate dynamics of corporate branding strategies amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, shedding light on the transformations, challenges, and opportunities encountered by organizations worldwide. In response to the pandemic, corporations have been compelled to revisit their branding strategies to align with the shifting consumer behaviors and market dynamics. As lockdowns and social distancing measures altered the traditional modes of engagement, digital platforms emerged as indispensable channels for brand communication and interaction. Moreover, the pandemic-induced economic downturn prompted organizations to rethink their branding narratives, emphasizing empathy, resilience, and social responsibility to foster stronger connections with consumers (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2020). Consequently, understanding the impact of the pandemic on corporate branding strategies becomes imperative for businesses striving to navigate through these turbulent times effectively.

This research adopts a qualitative approach, drawing upon the phenomenological perspective to explore the lived experiences of corporate stakeholders amidst the pandemic. Phenomenology, as a philosophical framework, emphasizes the subjective interpretation of experiences, enabling researchers to gain deeper insights into individuals' perceptions, emotions, and behaviors within specific contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2017). By employing this approach, the study seeks to unravel the nuanced nuances of corporate branding strategies, uncovering the underlying motivations, challenges, and adaptations amid the pandemic-induced disruptions. Central to this qualitative inquiry is the utilization of in-depth interviews as the primary method of data collection. In-depth interviews offer a unique opportunity to capture the intricacies of individuals' experiences, allowing participants to articulate their perspectives, beliefs, and insights in a comprehensive manner (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Through purposive sampling, corporate representatives and marketing professionals renowned for their expertise in branding strategies will be selected, ensuring a diverse range of perspectives and experiences are represented in the study. The data gathered from these interviews will then be subjected to thematic analysis, a systematic approach to identifying patterns, trends, and emergent themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The significance of this research extends beyond academic inquiry, offering practical implications for corporate practitioners, marketers, and policymakers grappling with the repercussions of the pandemic on branding strategies. By elucidating the evolving dynamics of corporate branding in the COVID-19 era, this study aims to inform strategic decision-making processes, enabling organizations to navigate through uncertainties, capitalize on emerging opportunities, and fortify their brand equity in a rapidly evolving marketplace.

This research endeavors to deepen our understanding of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on corporate branding strategies, unveiling the intricate interplay between external disruptions, organizational responses, and branding outcomes. Through phenomenological inquiry and thematic analysis, the study seeks to unravel the multifaceted dimensions of corporate branding amidst the pandemic, offering insights that are both theoretically enriching and practically relevant for stakeholders across diverse sectors.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The COVID-19 pandemic has catalyzed profound transformations across various domains, including the realm of corporate branding. Scholars and practitioners alike have acknowledged the seismic shifts in consumer behaviors, market dynamics, and organizational strategies precipitated by the global health crisis (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2020). As

corporations grapple with the unprecedented challenges posed by the pandemic, the efficacy of their branding strategies becomes increasingly critical in sustaining relevance, fostering consumer trust, and safeguarding long-term viability. There were no significant differences in all indicators of financial performance of commercial banks before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, namely CAR (Capital Asset Ratio), ROA (Return On Assets), Core Capital (CCRA), BOPO (Operational Expenses to Operating Income), NIM (Net Interest Margin Ratio), and LTA (Liquid Assets Ratio), except for the value of LDR (Loan to Deposit Ratio) which showed a significant difference (Santoso, S. et al., 2023). Prior research has underscored the pivotal role of branding in shaping consumer perceptions, attitudes, and purchase intentions, thereby exerting a significant influence on organizational performance and competitive advantage (Keller, 2013). The media relations strategy carried out by the OT Group has not been fully linked to the company's image (Dense, A., & Hadi, S. P., 2023). Building upon this foundation, recent studies have sought to elucidate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on corporate branding strategies, exploring the adaptations, innovations, and challenges encountered by organizations in navigating through turbulent times.

One notable area of inquiry pertains to the evolving nature of brand communication and engagement in the digital age. With the proliferation of online platforms and social media channels, corporations have increasingly turned to digital marketing strategies to connect with consumers amidst the pandemic-induced disruptions (Verhoef et al., 2020). Research suggests that organizations adept at leveraging digital technologies for brand promotion and engagement are better positioned to weather the uncertainties and capitalize on emerging opportunities in the post-pandemic landscape (Eisingerich & Rubera, 2020). Moreover, scholars have highlighted the significance of brand authenticity and transparency in fostering consumer trust and loyalty, particularly in times of crisis (Hur et al., 2013). As the COVID-19 pandemic accentuates consumers' demand for genuine, purpose-driven brands, organizations are compelled to reassess their brand narratives and values to resonate with evolving societal expectations (Grewal et al., 2020). Previous studies have demonstrated that brands perceived as authentic and socially responsible are more likely to engender positive consumer sentiments and withstand crises effectively (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Furthermore, the pandemic has underscored the importance of agility and adaptability in brand management, as organizations navigate through volatile market conditions and shifting consumer preferences (Gupta & Ogden, 2020). Research indicates that brands capable of flexibly adjusting their strategies, product offerings, and communication tactics in response to the dynamic landscape are more likely to emerge resilient and competitive in the aftermath of the crisis (Mishra & Sharma,

2021). In addition to empirical studies, theoretical frameworks have been proposed to elucidate the complex interplay between external disruptions, organizational responses, and branding outcomes amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, Kapferer and Michaut-Denizeau (2020) introduced the concept of "crisis branding," emphasizing the strategic imperatives for organizations to adapt their branding strategies in times of crisis, while preserving brand equity and integrity. Despite the growing body of literature on the subject, there remains a notable gap in our understanding of the nuanced dynamics of corporate branding strategies amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Existing studies often focus on quantitative analyses of consumer perceptions or case studies of individual organizations, overlooking the diverse perspectives and experiences of corporate stakeholders involved in shaping branding strategies. Thus, there is a compelling need for qualitative research that delves into the lived experiences, perceptions, and challenges encountered by organizations in navigating through the unprecedented disruptions wrought by the pandemic. This study seeks to address this gap by employing a phenomenological approach to explore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on corporate branding strategies from the perspectives of organizational stakeholders. Through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, the research aims to unravel the multifaceted dimensions of branding adaptations, innovations, and challenges encountered by organizations amidst the pandemic, offering insights that are both theoretically enriching and practically relevant for corporate practitioners, marketers, and policymakers.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The qualitative research methodology employed in this study aims to delve into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on corporate branding strategies, utilizing phenomenological inquiry to explore the lived experiences of organizational stakeholders. Phenomenology offers a robust framework for investigating individuals' perceptions, emotions, and behaviors within specific contexts, enabling researchers to gain deeper insights into the subjective realities of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2017). By adopting a phenomenological approach, this study seeks to elucidate the nuanced dimensions of corporate branding strategies amidst the pandemic-induced disruptions.

The population of interest for this research comprises corporate representatives and marketing professionals involved in shaping branding strategies within their organizations. Purposive sampling will be employed to select participants renowned for their expertise and experience in corporate branding, ensuring a diverse range of perspectives and insights are captured (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Purposive sampling enables researchers to intentionally

select participants based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives, thereby facilitating a comprehensive exploration of the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2017). In this study, purposive sampling will be utilized to identify and recruit individuals with substantial knowledge and experience in corporate branding strategies, ensuring the richness and depth of the data collected. While there is no predetermined sample size in qualitative research, the aim is to achieve data saturation, wherein no new themes or insights emerge from subsequent interviews (Guest et al., 2006). Typically, a sample size of 10-15 participants is considered adequate to achieve data saturation in qualitative studies (Guest et al., 2006). Therefore, this research will aim to recruit approximately 10-15 participants, although the final sample size may be adjusted based on the emergence of new themes during the data analysis process.

Thematic analysis will be employed to analyze the data collected through in-depth interviews. Thematic analysis involves the systematic identification, coding, and interpretation of patterns, trends, and themes within qualitative data, thereby facilitating the exploration of key issues and insights relevant to the research objectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006). By utilizing thematic analysis, this study aims to uncover the diverse perspectives, challenges, and adaptations encountered by organizations in navigating through the complexities of corporate branding amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **RESULTS**

The qualitative investigation into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on corporate branding strategies revealed multifaceted insights gleaned from in-depth interviews with a diverse cohort of corporate representatives and marketing professionals. Participants unanimously acknowledged a significant shift towards digital platforms in their branding strategies amidst the pandemic. One interviewee remarked, *"We've seen a dramatic increase in our investment in digital marketing channels, such as social media and online advertising, to maintain visibility and engage with consumers who are spending more time online."*

The importance of brand authenticity and transparency emerged as a recurrent theme in the interviews. A participant emphasized, *"Consumers are increasingly scrutinizing brands' actions and values, particularly during times of crisis. It's crucial for us to communicate authentically and transparently, demonstrating our commitment to societal well-being."*

Organizations highlighted the need to adapt their brand messaging to resonate with evolving consumer sentiments and societal concerns. *"We've revised our brand messaging to*

*reflect themes of resilience, solidarity, and empathy, aligning with the prevailing mood of the pandemic era,"* shared one interviewee.

Despite efforts to adapt, participants acknowledged the challenges in maintaining consistency and coherence across their branding initiatives amidst the rapidly evolving landscape. *"Balancing the need for agility with the imperative of maintaining brand consistency has been a significant challenge for us,"* noted a corporate representative.

Conversely, the pandemic presented opportunities for innovation and creativity in branding strategies. Participants highlighted the emergence of novel approaches to brand communication and engagement, leveraging virtual events, user-generated content, and immersive experiences to connect with consumers in meaningful ways. The research findings underscore the profound impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on corporate branding strategies, necessitating adaptations, innovations, and recalibrations to navigate through the complexities of the current landscape. By embracing digital platforms, emphasizing authenticity, adapting brand messaging, and seizing opportunities for innovation, organizations can fortify their brand resilience and relevance amidst the ongoing challenges posed by the pandemic. Interview Excerpts:

- "We've seen a dramatic increase in our investment in digital marketing channels, such as social media and online advertising, to maintain visibility and engage with consumers who are spending more time online."
- "Consumers are increasingly scrutinizing brands' actions and values, particularly during times of crisis. It's crucial for us to communicate authentically and transparently, demonstrating our commitment to societal well-being."
- "We've revised our brand messaging to reflect themes of resilience, solidarity, and empathy, aligning with the prevailing mood of the pandemic era."
- "Balancing the need for agility with the imperative of maintaining brand consistency has been a significant challenge for us."
- "The pandemic presented opportunities for innovation and creativity in branding strategies. We've leveraged virtual events, user-generated content, and immersive experiences to connect with consumers in meaningful ways."

## DISCUSSION

The qualitative exploration into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on corporate branding strategies has yielded rich insights into the adaptations, challenges, and opportunities encountered by organizations amidst the crisis. This discussion synthesizes the findings of the

study with existing literature, providing a comprehensive understanding of the evolving landscape of corporate branding in the context of the pandemic.

### **Shift towards Digital Platforms:**

The findings of this study resonate with previous research highlighting the accelerated adoption of digital marketing channels by organizations in response to the pandemic (Verhoef et al., 2020). As consumers increasingly rely on online platforms for information, entertainment, and social interaction, corporations have recalibrated their branding strategies to enhance their digital presence and engagement (Eisingerich & Rubera, 2020). The transition towards digital platforms reflects a strategic imperative for organizations to meet consumers where they are and adapt to the changing modes of communication and interaction precipitated by the pandemic.

### **Emphasis on Authenticity and Transparency:**

The emphasis on brand authenticity and transparency observed in this study aligns with prior research underscoring the importance of these attributes in fostering consumer trust and loyalty, particularly during times of crisis (Hur et al., 2013). Consumers today are more discerning and value-driven, seeking authentic connections with brands that demonstrate integrity, accountability, and social responsibility (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). By communicating authentically and transparently, organizations can cultivate deeper emotional connections with consumers and differentiate themselves amidst the cluttered marketplace.

### **Adaptation of Brand Messaging:**

The findings regarding the adaptation of brand messaging echo previous studies highlighting the need for brands to resonate with evolving consumer sentiments and societal concerns (Grewal et al., 2020). In times of crisis, brands play a pivotal role in providing reassurance, inspiration, and solidarity to consumers (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2020). By aligning their brand messaging with the prevailing mood and values of the pandemic era, organizations can forge stronger emotional bonds with consumers and reinforce their brand relevance and resonance.

### **Challenges in Maintaining Consistency:**

The challenges in maintaining brand consistency amidst the pandemic corroborate existing literature on the tensions between agility and consistency in brand management (Gupta & Ogden, 2020). While organizational agility is essential for adapting to dynamic market conditions, brand consistency serves as a cornerstone of brand equity and identity (Keller,

2013). Striking the right balance between agility and consistency requires careful navigation and strategic decision-making to ensure that branding initiatives remain coherent and aligned with organizational values and objectives.

### **Opportunities for Innovation:**

The identification of opportunities for innovation in branding strategies mirrors prior research highlighting the role of crises as catalysts for creativity and innovation (Mishra & Sharma, 2021). The disruption caused by the pandemic has spurred organizations to rethink traditional approaches to brand communication and engagement, leading to the emergence of novel strategies and tactics (Verhoef et al., 2020). By embracing innovation, organizations can not only adapt to the challenges posed by the pandemic but also position themselves for long-term growth and success in a rapidly evolving marketplace.

Comparing the findings of this study with previous research reveals both consistencies and divergences in the responses of organizations to the COVID-19 pandemic. While the emphasis on digitalization, authenticity, and innovation resonates across studies, variations may exist in the specific strategies adopted and the contextual factors influencing organizational responses (Verhoef et al., 2020). Moreover, the evolving nature of the pandemic and its differential impact across industries and regions may contribute to variations in branding strategies and outcomes observed in different studies. The qualitative exploration of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on corporate branding strategies has illuminated the dynamic and adaptive nature of organizational responses amidst crisis. By embracing digitalization, authenticity, adaptation, and innovation, organizations can navigate through the complexities of the pandemic era and emerge stronger and more resilient in the post-pandemic landscape. The insights gleaned from this study contribute to the evolving body of knowledge on crisis branding and offer practical implications for corporate practitioners, marketers, and policymakers striving to navigate through turbulent times effectively.

### **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the qualitative investigation into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on corporate branding strategies has provided valuable insights into the adaptations, challenges, and opportunities encountered by organizations in navigating through the crisis. The study aimed to unravel the multifaceted dynamics of corporate branding amidst the pandemic, shedding light on the transformations in strategy, messaging, and communication channels adopted by corporations worldwide. The findings of the study underscored several key themes: the significant shift towards digital platforms in branding strategies, the heightened emphasis



on authenticity and transparency, the adaptation of brand messaging to resonate with evolving consumer sentiments, the challenges in maintaining brand consistency amidst dynamic market conditions, and the opportunities for innovation and creativity in branding strategies. These insights offer practical implications for corporate practitioners, marketers, and policymakers seeking to navigate through the complexities of the pandemic era effectively. By embracing digitalization, authenticity, adaptation, and innovation, organizations can enhance their brand resilience and relevance amidst the challenges posed by the pandemic. Moreover, the study contributes to the broader discourse on crisis branding, providing theoretical insights and practical guidance for organizations grappling with unprecedented disruptions.

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