Exploring Marketing Strategies of Deaf Employing Coffee Shops in the Greater Jakarta (Case Study of Sunyi Coffee and Difabis Coffee)

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Abstract. In a world that gradually promotes inclusive workplace and business practice, Sunyi Coffee and Difabis Coffee have become businesses which employ People with Disability (PwD) as their core employees. Aside from embodying both coffee shops’ benevolent missions, this strategy also serves as a part of a marketing strategy to maneuver in a highly competitive, almost saturated coffee shop industry in Greater Jakarta. This research was conducted to explore how both coffee shops tailor different strategies and offerings around the theme of disability employment. This study used a descriptive qualitative method with a case study approach through a variety of data collection, such as interviews with customers, direct observation, online interviews with the founders, websites, social media, and relevant academic literature. Using Porter’s Five Forces Model, this study reveals that the coffee shop industry in Indonesia is highly competitive, with a high level of substitutes, new entrants, and buyers’ bargaining power. An analysis of the 7P marketing mix also shows people and place as the two most essential aspects for Sunyi Coffee and Difabis Coffee. Therefore, to establish a less contested market for themselves, both coffee shops create four action strategies (Eliminate-Reduce-Raise-Create) around these aspects, with Sunyi Coffee pursuing a differentiation strategy and Difabis Coffee focusing more on cost leadership.

Keywords: Coffee shop industry; Inclusive business; Marketing mix; Porter’s Five Forces

INTRODUCTION

People with disabilities (PwD) represent the largest minority group in Indonesia, comprising at least 23 million people or approximately 9% of the population (Siyaranamual & Larasati, 2020). PwD are often restricted from entering the labour market and accessing proper accommodations in workplaces due to social stigma and discrimination (Cameron & Suarez, 2017). As a result, unemployment and underemployment become common issues among PwD, with only 8.5 million (46%) participating in the labour market, even though most belong to the potential working-age group (Siyaranamual & Larasati, 2020). A recent study in 2020 shows that PwD are mostly employed as informal or part-time workers in the agricultural sector (47.9%), followed by the trade, restaurant, and hotel sector (21.8%) (Gunawan & Rezki, 2022). This condition might be because many PwD often have less access to education, and these sectors offer the most part-time vacancies that do not require a high degree of education (Stokar, 2017).

However, in recent years the global community has been directed into viewing PwD through the biopsychosocial model of disability, which supports the idea of involving PwD on an equal basis and increasing their socio-economic participation by eliminating environmental, economic, and social barriers (Petasis, 2019). Although slow-going and taxing, there has been a gradual, positive development of inclusive initiatives in various sectors. In the labour market sector, immense challenges to create an inclusive business practice and accessible workplaces for PwD in Indonesia persist, despite the improved and amended laws and regulations regarding disability employment. Nevertheless, a few businesses, such as Sunyi Savory & Brewery and Difabis Coffee & Tea, decided to take the matter into their hands and employ PwD as core workers in their day-to-day operations. Sunyi Savory & Brewery
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(otherwise known as Sunyi House of Coffee and Hope, and in this study, will be referred to as Sunyi Coffee) is a social enterprise established in 2019 by Mario Gultom, a hearing individual who wants to provide a workplace for the empowerment of PwD. On the other hand, Difabis Coffee & Tea (which will subsequently be referred to as Difabis Coffee) is a joint initiative established in 2021 between Badan Amil Zakat Nasional (National Zakat Agency, commonly referred to as Baznas) DKI Jakarta and Dinas Perindustrian, Perdagangan, Koperasi, Usaha Kecil dan Menengah (PPUKM or Department of Industry, Trade, Cooperatives, Small and Medium Enterprises). Most workers in these coffee shops, from baristas, cooks, and café attendants, are comprised of individuals with hearing loss, with only a small number of workers with physical impairment.

Suni Coffee and Difabis Coffee may not be the only food and beverage (F&B) businesses in Indonesia which welcome PwD into their workforces. Other brands, such as Burger King and Kurabu Ramen, have also done similar initiatives. However, such restaurants employ only a few numbers of PwD, and the total of workers with disabilities is often significantly outnumbered by workers without disabilities. Therefore, this study seeks to examine and explore the marketing strategy and approach which Sunyi Coffee and Difabis Coffee have done to ensure their business continuity among other typical F&B businesses, especially in a saturated market such as the coffee shop market in Indonesia. Furthermore, even though both Sunyi Coffee and Difabis Coffee offer similar services and products, the present study will compare their brand offerings’ differences. Hence, based on the above objective, this study will contribute to the body of literature by providing insights into the practices of businesses hiring PwD in the industry and F&B sector and how they can create competitive advantages in a highly competitive market. In this study, we will first look at the literature review covering the coffee shop market in Indonesia and the theoretical framework used in this study. Then, the next section will describe the research method, followed by results and discussions. Finally, the last part will highlight the conclusion of this study.

Literature Review

Sipping coffee and hanging out at a coffee shop has become a social habit for many Indonesians, especially the younger generations, these days (Imawan, 2020). Even though the growth of coffee shops is expected to decline after the pandemic in 2020, coffee consumers, enthusiasts and the rate of coffee consumption keep rising steadily (Toffin, 2020; Pramagista & Wandebori, 2021). In 2019, the number of coffee shops almost reached 3,000, tripling from the 2016 estimated number (Toffin, 2020). Nevertheless, this high number might lead to a saturation point for coffee shop business, especially in urban areas like Greater Jakarta. In this current state, operating a coffee shop business in Greater Jakarta would be like swimming in the red ocean. According to Kim and Mauborgne (2005), the red ocean refers to an existing market where competition is high, and profits and growth are diminished. To operate and manage a company successfully in the red ocean, one must outcompete the competitors based on cost or quality in the established market boundaries and industry structure (Kim & Mauborgne, 2005). The competitive strategy based on cost minimization throughout the value chain is often called cost leadership strategy, while the one that strives to create unique products or services is the differentiation strategy (Baroto et al., 2012).

Suppose a company is entrapped in the highly competitive red ocean. In that case, it will be exposed to the risk of experiencing business stagnation or being forced to quit the market if such a business cannot compete for head-on with its rivals. Kim and Mauborgne (2015) also suggested that to avoid the red ocean trap, a company should pursue a strategy which can enable the creation of uncontested or less contested market space. In other words, it should create a blue ocean on its own. The researchers further pointed out that the vital element in creating the blue ocean is value innovation, that is when a company can lower costs while increasing value for buyers simultaneously (Kim & Mauborgne, 2015). In other words, a company needs to combine the cost leadership and differentiation strategy at the same time to create a blue ocean (Baroto et al., 2012). According to Kim & Mauborgne (2015), there are four key actions to achieve this: 1. Eliminating factors that might no longer have value (Eliminate), 2. Reducing factors which might be overinvested (Reduce), 3. Creating new factors uncommon to the industry (Create), 4. Raising factors that the customers truly need, which might be overlooked by the industry (Raise).

To see how both coffee shops maneuver in the red ocean and whether there are attempts to create blue oceans, we need to examine their circumstances in the market space. Understanding the competitive external environment will provide deeper insight into the known market space in which both coffee shops operate. Porter (1980, in Schermerhorn et al., 2017) provided a framework to analyze a company’s competitive external environment. The five factors in the framework influencing the market competition level are suppliers, substitutes, new entrants, customers, and industry competition. On the other hand, knowing a business’s current state of play could also mean understanding one’s offerings on the market. As the marketplace becomes complicated, marketing strategies incorporating the ability to sense the market and connect to the customers are crucial (Wirtz et al., 2014). Accordingly, a company’s marketing strategies and offerings are reflected in seven elements that form its marketing mix: price, product, place, promotion, physical evidence, process, and people (Kotler & Armstrong, 2017).

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METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative method with a case study approach. The author chose this approach as it is helpful to investigate and analyze a collective case regarding the marketing approach in two different coffee shops and capture the complexity of the topic (Stake, 1995). In the case study approach, data collection often comes from multiple sources of information (Stake, 1995; Baskarada, 2014). Therefore, for this study, the author derived data and information from interviews with four workers, direct observation, online interviews with the founders, websites, social media, and various relevant academic literature. Currently, both coffee shops open several branches in the Greater Jakarta area. Sunyi Coffee has three branches in Alam Sutera, Kota Tua, and Bekasi area. Whilst Difabis Coffee & Tea opens branches in Kendal Walking Tunnel Sudirman, East Jakarta and North Jakarta Mayor Office complex. Direct observation was conducted from May until June 2022 on the Sunyi Coffee Alam Sutera branch and Difabis Coffee & Tea Sudirman branch. Therefore, this study will essentially focus on these branches, but the discussion will also cover information obtained from social media observation. Based on the data obtained, using Porter’s Five Forces Model, this study will first present an analysis of the industry’s competition level that influences the coffee shop industry in general. Then, this paper will analyze and compare the 7P marketing mix of Sunyi Coffee and Difabis Coffee to examine the difference in their offerings and marketing strategies. Altogether, these analyzes will provide an understanding of the current state of play in the industry and the factors that both coffee shops compete on.

RESULTS

Table 1
Comparison on marketing mix of Sunyi Coffee and Difabis Coffee

| **Product** | Sunyi Coffee | Difabis Coffee |
|-------------|--------------|----------------|
| - Coffee, international and local dishes, and other beverages. Coffee included an uncommon menu, such as Mangopresso. | - Coffee, snacks (e.g., cookies, cake), and other beverages. |
| - Packaged coffee beans (Blind Woodfire Gayo), harvested by blind farmers. | |
| **Price** | Middle to high | Low to middle |
| **Place** | - 4 branches (Tangerang, Bekasi, South Jakarta, Yogyakarta). | - 3 branches (Central Jakarta, East Jakarta, North Jakarta). |
| - Sunyi Coffee Bekasi outlet provides accessible facilities (e.g., tactile paving) for customers with disabilities. In contrast, ambience in other outlets (i.e., Alam Sutera branch) is similar to typical coffee shops in general. | - Difabis Coffee Central Jakarta branch is designed as a grab-and-go coffee shop, while the two other outlets provide enough space for customers to sit around the coffee shops. |
| - Place is intended for people who like to spend considerable time at a café instead of for coffee roammers. | - The Central Jakarta branch has the most strategic position as it is located near a train station, at a walking tunnel passed by many commuters. |
| **Promotion** | There is a dedicated social media (Instagram) that Sunyi Coffee use to engage customers. Promotions (e.g., bundling menu with lower price) are mainly on social media (Instagram). | There is a dedicated social media (Instagram) that Difabis Coffee use to engage customers. But not much promotion (in terms of giveaway, discounts, etc.) is advertised during direct observation in May-June 2022. |
| **Physical evidence** | The most notable service offered by Sunyi Coffee is the experience for customers to learn Bisindo (Indonesian sign language). Customers can do this by bringing a small table sign (placed in every table, with written text: “Let’s learn sign language! Please bring this signboard to the cashier. Our barista is ready to teach you.”) to an employee. Then, staff will take the interested customer to a table where they can converse or practise in Bisindo. | - The shop’s ambience is designed like typical grab-and-go coffee shops. |
| | - Operates every day and utilizes ride-hailing services (e.g., GoFood, GrabFood). | - There are many signboards with written instructions for customers to facilitate smooth transactions. |
| | - There is a uniqueness and novelty in the food order process where customers are required to order using sign language. Based on the observation conducted in May 2022, there isn’t any obvious sign on the counter or cashier informing staff are deaf (even though there is a large banner stating the coffee shop is entirely staffed by deaf workers and PwD). So, the employee will directly notify an uninform new customer that s/he cannot hear the order. Thus, they need to order by pointing out which menu they would like to order. | - Operates every day, but there is no evidence of the utilization of ride-hailing services. |
| | | - There is an obvious sign on the counter that the staff is deaf, so the customers are aware of the situation. Hence, it minimizes the need for the employee to explain their condition, and the customers are more likely to use sign language to make an order accordingly. Instructions on making an order and payment are also written on the signboards, so there is a limited opportunity for customers and staff to interact. |
Upon closer examination of the external environment, based on the above Porter’s five forces analysis, the level of competition in the coffee shop industry is quite intense, with many existing large brands already taking up the majority of market share. The threats of new entrants and substitutes are also high, indicating that products are relatively easily interchangeable with those of new and existing competitors. The high level of buyers’ bargaining power is an indication that product differentiation in the coffee shop industry is typically low. Therefore, based on this analysis, it is confirmed that the coffee shop market in Indonesia is saturated. Given these circumstances, it might be hard for Sunyi Coffee and Difabis Coffee not to be entrapped in the red ocean’s intense competition. However, what both coffee shops have in common, that not every coffee shop has, is their staffing, which comprises PwD. This element of novelty could become the “untapped blue ocean potential” which expands the industry boundaries so that they could create the blue ocean for themselves within the existing red ocean to snatch new profit and growth opportunities (Kim & Mauborgne, 2015; Kalargyrou et al., 2018).

Both coffee shops employ PwD consisting mainly of deaf workers. This practice might add a key competing factor to their business as studies revealed that deaf workers are reliable, loyal, and considered better coffee brewers due to their heightened sense of smell (Friedner, 2013). However, although both coffee shops employ PwD consisting mainly of deaf workers, each company’s approach and purpose for such an initiative resulted in different models and practices. These differences can be seen in the aspect of ‘people’ in the 7p marketing mix, where in Difabis Coffee, deaf workers present a positive image and reflect the benevolent mission of a business that offers employment opportunities for people who are generally marginalized. In other words, Difabis Coffee attempts to recreate buyer value elements by emotionally attracting customers who value such a mission. Differently, Sunyi Coffee believes that a café is a business that also sells an experience. Thus, it decided to go beyond merely hiring PwD as workers by offering customers the opportunity to learn Bisindo (Indonesian sign language) and interact with the deaf baristas. This way, Sunyi Coffee’s employees might serve not only as mere staff but rather become ‘the face of Sunyi Coffee’ who embody the core value of the business. This practice is not seen in Difabis Coffee because, in Difabis Coffee, instructions to carry out transactions are written on the boards and banners around the shop, minimizing customers’ interactions with the staff. This opposite aspect is also evident in the author’s observations between May and June 2022.

The marketing mix also denotes different attempts of both coffee shops to break free from hypercompetitive red oceans. For Difabis Coffee, the entire marketing mix aims to reduce costs as low as possible. Difabis Coffee positions itself as a grab-and-go coffee shop. Therefore, it eliminates a factor presumed to be less valuable for grab-and-go café customers: café space. With a smaller shop, Difabis Coffee can also reduce operational costs, such as labor, electricity, and rental costs, as well as other costs related to store maintenance.

| Eliminate | Raise |
|-----------|-------|
| Café space | Price offering (competitive coffee price) |
| Reduce | Create |
| -Labor costs | Grab-and-go coffee concept |
| -Store maintenance and its related costs | |

Source: processed data

### Diagram 1

**Eliminate-Reduce-Raise-Create grid (Difabis Coffee)**

On the other hand, Sunyi Coffee, too, checked at least 2 of the strategies proposed in Kim and Mauborgne’s four action framework (2015). Firstly, regarding the Create strategy, Sunyi Coffee introduce a new factor which is still uncommon in the industry with its ‘Bisindo learning experience’ offering for customers. It also developed a new product line in the form of packaged coffee beans called Blind Woodfire Gayo. Sunyi House claimed that the coffee beans of Blind Woodfire Gayo are handpicked and selected by blind farmers in Aceh. Hence, the theme of this new product is linear with the company’s mission and embodies the company’s value in empowering PwD. The development of this new product line is also evidence of Sunyi Coffee’s attempt to expand its business line. In terms of the Raise strategy, the place becomes an important element for Sunyi Coffee to elevate overlooked factors that customers need. In contrast with Difabis Coffee, Sunyi Coffee establishes itself as a coffee shop providing ample space for customers to spend long hours in the café. This positioning is clearly shown in how Sunyi Coffee promotes
its outlets on its social media as a meeting point or a space for customers to work on their laptops. Furthermore, Sunyi Coffee also transformed its outlets into community hubs for PwD, thus, drawing demands from nontraditional customers. For instance, the Sunyi Coffee Alam Sutera branch collaborated with a Bisindo learning center (Pusbisindo) to conduct an offline Bisindo class. Other branches, such as the Bekasi branch, also provide accessible facilities, like tactile paving. Based on these strategies, it is likely that Sunyi Coffee’s offering purpose is oriented towards differentiation.

| Eliminate                  | Raise                      |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Employee turnover          | Experience for customers to learn Bisindo |
| -Café+working space       | -Product with value added  |
| -Community hub for PwD    |                            |

Source: processed data

**Diagram 2**

Eliminate-Reduce-Raise>Create grid (Sunyi Coffee)

Taken altogether, Difabis Coffee’s grab-and-go concept aligns with the cost leadership strategy as the overall operations require low labor costs and production costs compared to a typical coffee shop with a larger space. However, Difabis Coffee might need an aggressive price cut in the long run to compete with other brands. Eventually, this prolonged condition could lead to business exhaustion. Based on the Eliminate-Reduce-Raise>Create grid in Diagram 2, Difabis Coffee needs to balance its Raise and Create strategies to create buyer value and introduce differentiation in its offerings. By contrast, Sunyi Coffee puts more emphasis on the differentiation strategy. However, from Diagram 2, one can notice that, similar to Difabis Coffee, there is also an imbalance, particularly in the Eliminate and Reduce strategy. This condition could put the company at risk of overinvesting in aspects which might not necessarily be needed or valuable to the customers. Therefore, it might lose the chance for cost savings.

**CONCLUSION**

A company needs to create its blue ocean to survive in red ocean markets. Otherwise, the business might be at risk of stagnation or failure. Based on Porter’s Five Forces Model, the coffee industry in Indonesia has a highly competitive market. In other words, it is a red ocean for Sunyi Coffee and Difabis Coffee. To create a less contested market or a blue ocean for themselves, Sunyi Coffee and Difabis Coffee need to pursue a particular strategy which enables them to create value for buyers while simultaneously lowering costs. According to the 7p marketing mix, people and place are their offerings’ two most significant aspects. While Sunyi Coffee and Difabis Coffee hire PwD as a part of their marketing strategy, the eventual purposes are quite different. Tied to the analysis of Kim and Mauborgne’s four action framework, Difabis Coffee focuses its entire business process on lowering costs through Eliminate and Reduce strategies. Whilst Sunyi Coffee is likely to pursue differentiation through Create and Raise strategies. However, it is worth noting that creating the blue ocean requires lowering costs simultaneously with increasing value. Hence, both Sunyi Coffee and Difabis Coffee need to balance their Eliminate-Reduce-Create-Raise strategies to avoid being entrapped in the red ocean.

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