



## STRATEGIES AND CHALLENGES OF GROCERY TRADERS IN FACING ONLINE MARKET COMPETITION

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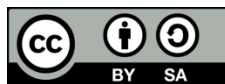
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### ABSTRACT

*Pasar Simpang Limun, as one of the largest traditional markets in Medan, is facing significant challenges due to the emergence of online markets. Changes in consumer shopping patterns that now prefer online shopping have led to a decline in the turnover of grocery merchants in this market. Price competition with cheap imported products, a decrease in the number of customers, and limited adoption of digital technology are the main challenges for traditional traders. This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with the methods of in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. The research subjects were purposively selected grocery traders in Simpang Limun Market. The data was analyzed to identify the challenges faced by traders as well as the survival strategies they apply amidst online market competition. The main challenges faced by grocery merchants include price competition with online markets, a decrease in the number of customers, and a decrease in turnover. Their coping strategies include highlighting product quality, adopting digitalization such as cashless payments and local delivery services (Gojek/Grab), and focusing on holidays to increase sales. However, some merchants still rely on conventional methods without utilizing technology. Digitalization and diversification of sales channels are key to maintaining the competitiveness of traditional merchants. Government interventions, such as digital literacy training, subsidies, regulation of imported products, and provision of digital infrastructure, are needed to support the sustainability of traditional markets.*

**Keywords:** Digitalization, Online Market, Traditional Market, Grocery Merchants, Survival Strategy

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Advances in information technology have brought about major changes in human life, including people's shopping patterns. The presence of online markets offers various conveniences such as 24/7 accessibility, a wide selection of products, and prices that are

often more competitive than traditional markets. This phenomenon is increasingly widespread in Indonesia, as shown by data from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) in 2024, where the internet penetration rate reached 79.5% of the total population. Of that number, 61% actively shop online, indicating a significant change in consumer behavior who now prefer online shopping to conventional shopping in traditional markets (Prasetyo et al., 2024).

However, this development poses a major challenge for traders in traditional markets, including grocery traders at Simpang Limun Market, Medan. Grocery traders are individuals or groups who run a small to medium scale daily necessities trading business (Hadi, 2016). Simpang Limun Market is one of the main traditional markets that has become a center of the local economy and a space for social interaction among the community. In this market, grocery traders provide various basic necessities, groceries, cleaning tools, and other household needs that are sold in a unique way, such as bargaining, and offer a flexible and easily accessible shopping experience for the surrounding community (Jumiati, 2022). Unfortunately, competition with online markets has caused many grocery traders to experience a significant decline in turnover due to the decreasing number of customers.

Grocery traders have unique characteristics, namely small capital which usually comes from savings or small-scale loans, personal services that emphasize trust relationships with customers, and strategic locations in residential areas or traditional markets that are easily accessible to the public (Yuningrum, 2016).

This challenge is increasingly difficult because most traditional traders in Simpang Limun Market do not yet have the knowledge or access to utilize digital technology. Online markets or e-commerce have experienced rapid development in recent years, becoming one of the main sectors in the global digital economy (Wijaya, 2023). Definition of online market Refers to a platform or media that allows transactions for buying and selling products and services via the internet (Solihin & Rohman, 2024).

In fact, the use of technology such as social media platforms, marketplaces, and digital payments can be a solution to increase their competitiveness. This unpreparedness makes traditional traders increasingly lagging behind in the competition, especially amidst changes in consumer behavior who now prefer online transactions. Challenges are not only seen as threats, but also as opportunities to learn, develop, and create competitive advantages. Therefore, challenges play an important role in encouraging individuals and organizations to think critically, innovate, and take more strategic steps in an effort to achieve success (Auliani et al., 2024). Strategy is a term derived from the Greek *strategia*, which literally means the art or science of becoming a general. Initially, this term was closely related to the military context, describing a systematic plan involving the division and use of military power in a particular area to achieve predetermined goals. However, over time, the concept of strategy has evolved beyond the military and become an important element in various fields, including business management, organizations, and industry (Shofa, 2022). Strategy can be interpreted as a series of decisions designed in a planned manner and actions implemented by an entity to achieve certain goals (Sulaiman & Asmawi, 2022).

The two main things that form the basis for determining a competitive strategy are the attractiveness of the industry for long-term profits and the factors that influence it. Not all

industries have the same level of attractiveness, so the resources inherent in an industry are one of the main determinants of the profits that can be achieved by the company (Rahmania, 2023). Types of strategies include product development strategies with innovation to attract more consumers, market development strategies by reaching new markets through strategic branches or partnerships, integration strategies that are usually implemented when facing liquidity difficulties through organizational mergers, and diversification strategies, both those that focus on certain market segments with product variants or conglomerate diversification to serve corporate groups with various products owned (Shofa, 2022). To create a competitive advantage, companies must pay attention to several important aspects, namely good product quality and according to consumer expectations, competitive pricing without violating ethics, adequate, clean, comfortable business locations, and in accordance with religious values (Dera et al., 2023) and friendly, polite, and professional service while maintaining ethics and moral norms (Zega, 2022)

In the study (Yohanna Meilani Putri et al., 2023) showed that even though grocery stores face stiff competition from supermarkets, minimarkets, and e-commerce, grocery stores still have an appeal because of their advantages, such as strategic locations, more affordable prices, personal service, and close social relationships between sellers and buyers. To survive, grocery store owners implement various strategies, such as delivery services, more attractive physical arrangements, and customer loyalty programs.

On the other hand, traditional markets such as Pasar Simpang Limun have advantages that cannot be offered by online markets. Direct interaction between sellers and buyers, a lively and busy market atmosphere, and a relationship of mutual trust that is formed personally are unique values that can be utilized. In addition, traditional markets also play an important role in supporting the economy of small communities and maintaining local social and cultural identities. This study aims to analyze the main challenges faced by grocery traders in Simpang Limun Market due to competition with online markets, and explore strategies they can implement to survive. Some relevant strategies include product diversification, improving service quality, and using simple technology tailored to local needs. This study also aims to provide traders with insight into opportunities they can take advantage of to stay relevant in the digital era.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach. This approach was chosen to deeply understand the strategies and challenges faced by grocery traders in Simpang Limun Market in facing competition with online markets. Qualitative research provides the freedom to explore the experiences, views, and perspectives of traders in their social and economic contexts. This study uses data collection methods that include observation, interviews, and documentation to understand the strategies and challenges of grocery traders in Simpang Limun Market in facing competition with online markets.

Observations were made by directly observing the activities of traders, including how they run their businesses, serve customers, carry out promotions, and interact with consumers, in order to obtain in-depth and contextual data about business practices in the field. This technique also helps identify challenges such as changes in consumer behavior, adaptation to technology, and pressure from online competitors. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with grocery traders to dig up in-depth information

about the strategies implemented, such as efforts to retain customers, adaptation to technological changes, and challenges faced in the digital era.

This approach allows researchers to explore the views and experiences of informants freely but in a directed manner. Meanwhile, documentation complements the data obtained by collecting photos, interview notes, recordings, and other documents such as related articles or reports. This documentation provides a real picture of the situation in the field and enriches the analysis of research results, resulting in more complete and integrated data on the adaptation of grocery traders to the dynamics of the online market.

### **3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

#### **General Profile of Simpang Limun Market**

Pasar Simpang Limun is one of the iconic traditional markets in Medan located on Jalan Sisingamangaraja. Before becoming a market, this location was a former lemonade factory that burned down in the 1970s. After the incident, this area was transformed into a trading center that serves various community needs.

This market is known as a daily shopping place, with traders selling basic necessities, vegetables, fruits, clothing, and household goods. Market activities start from early morning until evening, making it the main destination for buyers from various circles. The bargaining system is still a tradition that adds to the uniqueness of shopping here. In addition to the traditional area, Pasar Simpang Limun also has a supermarket to serve buyers who want a modern shopping experience. This combination reflects the changing needs of the community while still maintaining distinctive traditional elements.

This market has a strategic location because it is located on one of the main roads in Medan, making it easily accessible to locals and visitors from outside the city. The density of activity in this market creates a dynamic atmosphere and illustrates the economic life of the Medan community.

Pasar Simpang Limun has an area of around 2.7 hectares, making it one of the largest traditional markets in Medan. The location is bordered by:

1. North: Shopping and residential area.
2. East: Residential area.
3. South: Jalan Nawi Harahap which is an important access for visitors.
4. West: Jalan Sisingamangaraja, one of the main roads in Medan, which supports the smooth running of trading activities in this market.



**Figure 4.1 Simpang Limun Market**



**Figure 4.2 Writers and Traders at Simpang Limun**

### **Challenges for Simpang Limun Market Grocery Traders to Online Market Competition**

Simpang Limun Market, located on Jalan Sisingamangaraja, Medan, is a traditional market with an area of 2.7 hectares. This area is surrounded by shops and residential areas on the north and east sides, and borders Jalan Nawi Harahap in the south and Jalan Sisingamangaraja in the west. As one of the largest markets in Medan, this market is a center of busy and diverse economic activity, providing daily necessities such as basic necessities, clothing, and household goods.

This market offers a traditional atmosphere with a bargaining system that is still maintained. In addition, the existence of a supermarket area provides a more modern shopping alternative for visitors. This combination reflects the market's efforts to adapt to changing community needs. However, competition with online markets has created major challenges for traders who rely on conventional trading methods.

The development of technology and the rise of online markets have brought about major changes in trading patterns, including for grocery traders at Simpang Limun Market. Competition between traditional shops and online markets is getting tighter, creating

significant challenges. Many traders in this market have experienced a decline in turnover, fewer customers, and have had to adjust their business strategies in order to survive.

Online marketplaces allow merchants to reach consumers without geographical boundaries, but the impact is price competition and accessibility that are more difficult for traditional stores to match. In addition, consumer habits that now prefer to shop from home worsen the conditions for market traders. This forces them to adapt to stay relevant in an increasingly digital economy. Through interviews with traders at Simpang Limun Market, various perspectives were revealed on the challenges they face. These opinions provide insight into how online marketplaces affect the operations of traditional stores and the efforts of traders to deal with these conditions. We interviewed 3 sources:

*Kevin (One of the Grocery Store Owners):*

*"Actually, the existence of this online market has caused a lot of competition, like in other places without opening a store, you can sell online. But behind that, this can also expand the target market of our store. So there are pluses and minuses, first, there are more competitors, and second, this online market makes the scope of our store wider or more."*

*Yusuf (Owner of JM Grocery Store): "Yes, the challenge is that the store is quieter, the items in the store are also not selling as well as they used to. The decline in turnover has started since the COVID period until now, the rise of online sales has made people prefer to stay at home rather than come directly to our store."*

*Mrs. Halimah (Seller of Cooking Utensils and Cutlery):*

*"Since the introduction of this online system, we have also experienced a very significant decrease in income, from 9 million to 300 thousand per day in the last three years. The challenge is that online they sell goods very cheaply. Consumers are looking for cheap things, so our shop is quiet. In fact, if you pay attention, quality depends on price. If the price is cheap, the quality is not good. Meanwhile, we sell quality goods in this shop, so the price is more expensive."*

Based on interviews, the main challenges faced by grocery traders in Simpang Limun Market are:

- a. Price competition: Low prices in online markets are the main attraction for consumers, although the quality of goods can be lower.
- b. Declining number of customers: Consumers tend to choose the convenience of online shopping rather than coming to a physical store.
- c. Drastically decreasing turnover: Many traders have had difficulty maintaining their income in recent years.

### **Simpang Limun Market Grocery Traders' Survival Strategy Against Online Market Competition**

*Kevin (One of the Grocery Store Owners):*

*"As sellers, we have to keep up with the times, so now there are not only traditional ones, but there are customers who can't come, so the solution is online, so we still enter e-commerce so we can meet the needs of customers far from here. Like payments now, you don't have to be cash, digitalization is also possible, you can use transfers, QR codes, and so on. It doesn't have to be e-commerce, so we can use Gojek and Grab for pick-ups, so by WA orders, you can send Gojek, that's the solution."*

Kevin demonstrates a deep understanding of the importance of keeping up with the times in running a business. He realizes that consumer shopping patterns have shifted, from shopping directly in physical stores to ordering online. His move to integrate traditional grocery stores into the digital world, such as through an e-commerce platform, reflects an adaptation that is very relevant to the needs of modern consumers. The growth of the online market is influenced by economic, social, and technological factors, such as the development of the digital economy, increasing people's purchasing power, changes in consumer lifestyles that prioritize convenience, and the use of cloud technology and big data to analyze consumer behavior, providing opportunities and competitive advantages for companies (Riyana et al., 2024). He understands that not all customers have the ability or time to come directly to the store. Therefore, he chose to enter e-commerce as a solution to reach customers who are located far away. This decision not only expands the market reach, but also increases the efficiency of his business in meeting consumer needs practically and quickly. Kevin has also integrated digital payment methods, such as bank transfers and QR codes, which make it easier for consumers. This is important to follow the trend of people switching to non-cash transactions, especially in the post-pandemic era. This implementation makes his grocery store more modern and technology-friendly, while increasing customer convenience.

In addition to utilizing e-commerce, Kevin also uses local delivery services such as Gojek and Grab. Thus, customers can order their needs via WhatsApp, and goods can be delivered directly to their homes. This is a smart strategy, because it utilizes local technology to simplify the logistics process and provide fast and efficient services. This is in line with research (Alfiani, 2021) they also implement innovative services such as delivery of goods, online purchases via WhatsApp, and provide friendly service and maintain store cleanliness to create comfort for customers.

Not only seeing digitalization as a tool for selling goods, but also as a way to increase operational efficiency. By utilizing digital payments and application-based delivery services, he is able to save time, reduce additional costs, and increase customer satisfaction. His steps show that he is very sensitive to changes in consumer behavior. In the modern era, consumers tend to look for convenience in shopping, such as easy payment and direct delivery. Kevin's strategy puts his business in a competitive position, even though it comes from a traditional business sector.

*Yusuf (Owner of JM Grocery Store):*

*"There's no online following here, it can be busy on big days, it's not stable like big days or Sundays which are quite busy."*

Mr. Yusuf revealed that he has not adopted an online strategy in running his shop business. His business remains focused on a traditional approach by relying on direct visits from consumers. This shows that Mr. Yusuf's business still relies on old consumption patterns, where customers come to physical stores to shop. He said that his shop's income tends to increase only on big days or weekends. This shows that his business has an unstable sales pattern, with fluctuating customer visit rates. This dependence on momentum can be a weakness if not balanced with strategies that can increase sales on weekdays.

The above conditions are not significant to the results of the study (Meiliya & Susanti, 2024) which show that the use of marketing strategies such as attractive product layouts,

and the use of social media for promotion can significantly increase the number of customers and sales turnover of grocery stores in the area. Also the results of the study (Shofa, 2022) which show that in maintaining their business during the Covid-19 pandemic, grocery traders use 2 forms of strategy: 1) Marketing products through social media, 2) Collaborating with online transportation.

*Mrs. Halimah (Seller of Cooking Utensils and Cutlery):*

*"Yes, we just follow it, but sometimes when people compare it to the one on Shopee, I challenge them how much the price is different from ours which is of better quality. We are also online on Shopee, it was good at the beginning but now it's hard to compete with those Chinese products."*

Mrs. Halimah's statement reflects one of the biggest challenges facing local businesses, namely the increasingly tight price competition on e-commerce platforms such as Shopee. Imported products, especially from China, are often offered at much lower prices. However, Mrs. Halimah tries to compensate for this by highlighting the quality of the products she sells. This strategy shows that she understands the importance of added value (value proposition) to attract customers amidst price competition. Initially, online sales on Shopee provided a great opportunity for Mrs. Halimah. However, over time, competition with imported products made sales increasingly difficult. This reflects the reality faced by many MSMEs in Indonesia: when e-commerce platforms began to be flooded with cheap imported products, local MSMEs often struggled to maintain their competitiveness.

Mrs. Halimah's strategy of challenging buyers to compare the price and quality of her products shows an effort to educate consumers. She wants to show that cheaper prices often sacrifice quality. This approach is important, especially to build customer loyalty that prioritizes quality over just price. In line with the research results (Sitepu et al., 2024) which show that despite a decrease in the number of consumers, traditional market traders are still able to maintain sales turnover through competitive pricing strategies and bargaining systems that are preferred by consumers.

This study also found that convenience and quality of service in modern markets are factors that influence consumer preferences, but traditional markets still have their own appeal.

Even though competition is getting tighter, Mrs. Halimah still tries to keep up with developments by selling her products online. This shows flexibility and willingness to adapt to changes in consumer shopping behavior. However, this adaptation requires a more creative marketing strategy to highlight the uniqueness of its products compared to imported products.

The following are the strategies carried out by the three traders based on the interview results:

1. **Emphasizing Product Quality:** focusing on building the perception that their products are of better quality than cheap imported products. Educating consumers to consider product value, not just price.
2. **Digitalization Integration:** adopting digital payments, such as bank transfers and QR codes, to meet modern consumer preferences.



3. Utilizing Online Services and Local Logistics: Using Gojek, Grab, and WhatsApp to receive orders and send goods directly to customers, providing flexibility and convenience.
4. Optimizing Big Days and Busy Moments: Sales are higher on big days and weekends, indicating a strategy of focusing on certain momentum to increase revenue.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This article reflects a significant shift in consumer shopping patterns that now prioritize the convenience of online shopping over visiting traditional markets. This transformation forces traders at Simpang Limun Market to face major challenges such as tight price competition, declining customer numbers, and drastically declining turnover. This situation highlights the importance of technological adaptation as a strategic step for traditional traders to stay relevant amidst increasingly competitive digital market competition.

Merchants who are able to integrate digital technology into their businesses demonstrate high flexibility and adaptability. For example, the use of non-cash payments, local delivery services such as Gojek and Grab, and marketing through e-commerce are the keys to the success of some merchants. However, challenges remain, especially in dealing with cheap imported products that dominate the online market. Other strategies such as highlighting product quality and establishing personal relationships with customers are important elements that are still relevant to maintaining consumer loyalty.

This article also emphasizes the need for support from the government and communities to strengthen the sustainability of traditional markets. Digital literacy training, subsidies, and regulation of imported products can help traditional traders compete healthily with online markets. Ultimately, effective adaptation to market changes requires synergy between individual innovation, collaboration between traders, and strategic intervention from authorities to create a more inclusive and competitive trading ecosystem.

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