



## BRANDING STRATEGY FOR MSME CULINARY PRODUCTS

**A. A Gede Ajusta, Wawan Ridwan, Nanang Lidwan, Eni Reptiningsih**  
**Universitas Bina Sarana Informatika**  
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### *Abstract*

*The culinary Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) sector is a strategic component of Indonesia's economy, contributing significantly to employment creation and community income. However, in an increasingly competitive market, many MSMEs struggle to build a strong and sustainable brand image. This study aims to analyze branding strategies employed by culinary MSMEs and evaluate their effectiveness in enhancing business competitiveness. This research adopts a qualitative approach using a case study method involving five culinary MSMEs in urban areas. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and visual documentation. Thematic analysis and SWOT framework were used to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the branding strategies implemented. The findings show that common branding strategies include the use of visual identity (logos and packaging), brand storytelling, and the use of social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. MSMEs that implemented branding consistently reported increased brand awareness, customer loyalty, and sales volume. Major challenges faced include limited knowledge of branding, lack of time, and insufficient human resources. Effective branding has proven to improve MSME competitiveness, even with limited budgets. This study recommends branding training programs, digital mentoring, and collaborations between MSMEs and creative communities. Simple but consistent branding can be the key to maintaining business sustainability and expanding market reach for culinary MSMEs.*

**Keywords:** *Branding, MSMEs, Culinary Products, Marketing Strategy, Competitiveness, Social Media*

### **Abstrak**

Usaha Mikro, Kecil, dan Menengah (UMKM) kuliner merupakan sektor strategis dalam perekonomian Indonesia karena kontribusinya terhadap penciptaan lapangan kerja dan peningkatan pendapatan masyarakat. Namun, di tengah persaingan pasar yang ketat, banyak UMKM kesulitan dalam membangun citra merek yang kuat dan berkelanjutan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis strategi branding yang diterapkan oleh pelaku UMKM kuliner serta mengevaluasi efektivitasnya dalam meningkatkan daya saing usaha. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi kasus pada lima UMKM kuliner di wilayah urban. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan dokumentasi visual. Analisis dilakukan secara tematik dan menggunakan kerangka analisis SWOT untuk mengevaluasi kekuatan, kelemahan, peluang, dan ancaman dari strategi branding yang diterapkan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa strategi branding yang umum diterapkan meliputi penggunaan identitas visual (logo dan kemasan), storytelling merek, serta



pemanfaatan media sosial seperti Instagram dan TikTok. UMKM yang menerapkan branding secara konsisten mengalami peningkatan brand awareness, loyalitas pelanggan, dan volume penjualan. Kendala yang dihadapi meliputi keterbatasan pengetahuan tentang branding, waktu, dan sumber daya manusia. Branding yang kuat terbukti mampu meningkatkan daya saing UMKM, bahkan dengan anggaran terbatas. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan perlunya pelatihan branding, pendampingan digital, serta kolaborasi antara UMKM dan komunitas kreatif. Branding yang sederhana namun konsisten dapat menjadi kunci keberhasilan dalam mempertahankan eksistensi dan memperluas pasar UMKM kuliner.

**Kata kunci:** Branding, UMKM, Produk Kuliner, Strategi Pemasaran, Daya Saing, Media Sosial

## I. INTRODUCTION

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play a crucial role in the Indonesian economy. According to data from the Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs, MSMEs contribute more than 60% to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employ approximately 97% of the national workforce. Among the various MSME sectors, the culinary industry is one of the fastest-growing due to low barriers to entry and high public demand for food and beverages, both conventionally and through online food delivery.

However, amidst increasingly fierce competition, culinary MSMEs face serious challenges in maintaining their existence. One of the main causes of the low competitiveness of MSME products is the suboptimal implementation of branding strategies. Many businesses still rely solely on taste quality, neglecting the importance of a strong brand identity, visual consistency, and targeted and planned brand communications. This results in MSME culinary products often lacking clear differentiation in the eyes of consumers and losing out to products from major brands and other MSMEs that are more strategic in building their brand image.

Branding is no longer the sole domain of large companies; it has become a fundamental requirement for MSMEs to survive and thrive. Branding isn't just about creating a logo or business name; it encompasses a comprehensive strategy for creating a positive perception in the minds of consumers, including storytelling, packaging design, customer service, and social media utilization. In today's digital age, platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp Business have become effective tools for building and disseminating brand image, even at a relatively low cost.

Despite these numerous opportunities, the implementation of appropriate branding strategies among culinary MSMEs remains limited and poorly documented. Lack of knowledge, budget constraints, and low digital literacy are key obstacles. Therefore, this

research is crucial to delve deeper into the branding strategies implemented by culinary MSMEs, understand their effectiveness, and identify the challenges they face in the process.

Based on this background, this study aims to:

1. Analyze branding strategies implemented by MSMEs in the culinary sector;
2. Evaluate the impact of branding strategies on competitiveness and consumer loyalty;
3. Develop recommendations for relevant branding strategies that can be implemented by MSMEs with limited resources.

Through this research, it is hoped that a more systematic understanding of branding practices among culinary MSMEs can be obtained and that it will contribute to the development of literature and inclusive and sustainable business practices.

## **II. THEORETICAL STUDIES**

### **2.1 Branding Concept**

Branding is a strategic process for building a strong brand identity and image in the minds of consumers. According to Keller (2013), branding encompasses activities to create positive perceptions of a product or service through elements such as name, logo, symbol, design, and emotional associations attached to the brand. The primary goal of branding is to create brand equity, namely the added value a brand provides to a product compared to similar, unbranded products.

Aaker (1996) proposed five main dimensions of brand equity:

1. Brand awareness,
2. Brand association,
3. Perceived quality,
4. Brand loyalty,
5. Other proprietary brand assets.

In the context of MSMEs, strengthening brand equity is crucial for creating differentiation, increasing customer trust, and expanding market reach.

### **2.2 Culinary Product Branding Strategy**

Setiawati et al. (2019) explained that socialization in building branding for businesses has proven effective in providing an understanding of branding strategies, such as logo design, appropriate target markets, partnerships, and consistency.

Culinary products have unique characteristics because they involve aspects of taste, visuals, and customer experience. According to Kotler & Keller (2016), branding in food and

beverage products depends not only on product quality but also on packaging, storytelling, and the overall consumer experience. The right branding strategy can build emotional connections with consumers, increase customer retention, and strengthen the brand's position in the market.

Some branding strategies commonly applied to culinary products include:

- Visually appealing packaging: Aesthetic design can attract consumers' attention and convey a professional impression.
- Use of social media: Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube are key platforms for building visual branding and engaging directly with consumers.
- Brand storytelling: Conveying the values, origins of recipes, or stories behind products can strengthen brand uniqueness.
- Endorsements and user-generated content: Collaborating with food bloggers and customer reviews strengthens the image and trust in products.

### **2.3 Branding and MSME Competitiveness**

Culinary MSMEs often struggle to create sustainable competitiveness due to limited capital, knowledge, and market access. According to Tambunan (2009), challenges faced by MSMEs in Indonesia include a lack of managerial skills, limited innovation, and limited access to information and communication technology.

Branding can be a key strategy to overcome these limitations. Research by Handayani et al. (2020) shows that MSMEs with consistent branding strategies tend to experience increased brand visibility, consumer loyalty, and revenue. Branding also encourages consumers to make repeat purchases, even if the product is priced higher than unbranded competitors.

### **2.4 The Role of Digital Marketing in MSME Branding**

Digital marketing provides a significant opportunity for MSMEs to build their brands efficiently and affordably. Social media allows for direct interaction with customers, distribution of visual content, and real-time monitoring of market trends. According to Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick (2019), digital marketing enables personalized marketing strategies, increases engagement, and accurately measures the effectiveness of branding campaigns.

Various digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Shopee Live, and Google My Business have been used by MSMEs to establish a visual identity and expand market reach.

The success of digital branding depends heavily on content consistency, customer engagement, and authentic storytelling.

## **2.5 Previous Studies on Culinary MSME Branding**

Achsa, A., & Dewi, M.S.E. (2021) found that visual consistency, the use of local language in content, and local community involvement are important factors in the branding success of culinary MSMEs in Central Java. According to Kotler (2000) in (Nastain, 2017; Adia, 2019), a brand is a name, term, sign, symbol, design, or combination of all elements used to identify a product or service from an individual or group of sellers from its competitors. A brand serves as a strong emotional bond between customers and consumers, a platform for strategic options, and a force influencing financial performance. The strength of a brand has fostered customer loyalty, leading to business success, resilience, and competitive products. Brands, with all their power, have different meanings and different purposes.

Anggrianto et al., (2017), entitled "Managing Apple Inc.'s Branding Strategy to Create Consumer Loyalty," this study aims to determine the branding strategy employed by Apple Inc. to maintain its Top of Mind status in the minds of its consumers. The results of this study are expected to contribute to developing discourse on the importance of brand management to increase the selling value and competitiveness of a business. This study uses a qualitative data collection method supported by a literature review. The research results show that Apple, a brand renowned for its innovation, has maintained its position at the top of the Most Valuable Brands list for years. Apple Inc. has been able to build and manage its brand, making it beloved by consumers and top of mind among similar products.

However, most previous research is descriptive in nature and has not deeply analyzed the relationship between branding strategy and increased competitiveness in the culinary MSME context. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap with a case study approach and thematic analysis of actual MSME branding practices.

## **III. RESEARCH METHODS**

### **3.1 Research Type and Approach**

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study method. This approach was chosen to gain an in-depth and contextual understanding of branding practices implemented by MSMEs in the culinary sector. Case studies allow researchers to comprehensively explore branding strategies in a real-life and complex context.

According to Moleong (2017), qualitative research aims to understand phenomena experienced by research subjects, such as behavior, perceptions, motivations, actions, and so on, holistically and through descriptive language, within a specific, natural context, utilizing various natural methods.

### **3.2 Research Location and Subjects**

The research was conducted in the city of Depok, West Java, known for its rapid growth in the culinary MSME industry. The research subjects consisted of five culinary MSMEs who had been in business for at least two years and actively promoted their products through social media or other digital platforms. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, based on the following criteria:

- They are MSMEs in the food and beverage sector,
- They have implemented branding strategies (visual, narrative, or digital),
- They are willing to be interviewed and have their branding practices documented.

### **3.3 Data Collection Techniques**

Data were collected through three main techniques:

#### **1. In-Depth Interviews**

Conducted semi-structured with MSME owners or managers. Questions covered business background, implemented branding strategies, perceptions of branding impact, and challenges faced.

#### **2. Participatory Observation**

Researchers directly observed branding activities, both in physical stores (if any) and on digital channels such as social media, marketplaces, and official websites.

#### **3. Documentation**

Collected visual documents such as logos, product packaging, social media posts, brochures, or other promotional materials for analysis as part of brand identity.

### **3.4 Data Analysis Techniques**

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, identifying important patterns or themes from interviews and observations. The steps included:

- Transcribing interviews,
- Coding data based on categories such as branding strategy, digital platforms, challenges, and impacts,
- Developing key themes based on the coding results.

In addition, a SWOT analysis was used for each MSME case to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in implementing their branding strategies.

### 3.5 Data Validity (Triangulation)

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, triangulation of sources and techniques was conducted. Interview results were validated through observation and visual documentation. Furthermore, reconfirmation (member checking) was conducted with informants to avoid misinterpretation of the data.

## IV. RESEARCH RESULTS

### 4.1 Implemented Branding Strategies

From interviews and observations, it was found that the five MSMEs had implemented various branding strategies with varying approaches. Common strategies include:

- **Visual Identity:** All MSMEs had unique logos and packaging designs, although not all were consistent across platforms. The MSMEs had professional and aesthetically appealing visual designs.
- **Storytelling:** The MSMEs used a strong narrative approach, highlighting cultural values and family history as part of their brand identity. This approach fostered emotional bonding with consumers.
- **Social Media and Influencers:** The MSMEs actively utilized social media with creative and scheduled content. MSME B even collaborated with local food influencers to increase visibility.
- **Digital Services and Interaction:** They provided fast-response services through social media and marketplaces, and utilized features such as digital catalogs and customer testimonials.

### 4.2 SWOT Analysis of Branding Practices

A SWOT analysis was conducted for each MSME. The following are the general findings that can be synthesized from the five cases:

Component	Key Findings
Strengths	Strong and distinctive product taste, attractive packaging, unique narrative that builds differentiation.
Weaknesses	Branding consistency is not optimal, lack of professionalism in logo design and brand communication.
Opportunities	Digital marketing trends, consumer awareness of local products, ease of promotion through social media.
Threats	Tight competition, fluctuations in raw material prices, limited time and

Component	Key Findings
	human resources to manage branding professionally.

#### 4.3 Impact of Branding on Competitiveness

All informants acknowledged that branding strategies have a positive impact on sales and customer loyalty. Some identified indicators of success include:

- Increased brand awareness: MSMEs active on social media experience an increase in followers and engagement.
- Increased sales: There is an increase in online transactions, especially after implementing visual campaigns and promotions on digital platforms.
- Customer loyalty: Customers make repeat purchases more frequently from MSMEs with a clear brand identity and a strong narrative.
- Competitiveness in the marketplace: MSMEs that implement consistent branding are more easily found in searches and receive positive reviews.

However, challenges remain. Limited human resources, lack of training in graphic design and digital marketing, and multitasking among business owners hinder the development of more strategic branding.

#### 4.4 Discussion and Interpretation

These findings align with the theories of Keller (2013) and Aaker (1996), which state that brand equity is built through visual elements, consumer experiences, and emotional associations. MSMEs that successfully build emotional and visual connections with customers demonstrate better market performance. Furthermore, the role of digital marketing, as explained by Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick (2019), has proven to be a key lever in enhancing brand presence in the digital era.

Branding strategies based on locality and storytelling, such as those employed by MSMEs, create uniqueness that is difficult for competitors to imitate, strengthening differentiation and market loyalty. Meanwhile, the visual and digital approaches implemented by MSMEs show that branding that adapts to the trends of the young and digital native market yields significant results in engagement and sales.

These findings reinforce the argument that branding is not just about visuals, but also about experience, narrative, and consistent communication. While strong branding takes time, gradual efforts with a simple yet consistent approach have proven effective for culinary MSMEs.



## V. CONCLUSION

This research shows that branding strategy plays a crucial role in enhancing the competitiveness of culinary MSMEs, particularly in building brand identity, attracting consumer attention, and fostering customer loyalty. Based on the analysis of five culinary MSMEs in [specify region], the following key conclusions were obtained:

1. The branding strategies implemented are diverse, ranging from creating attractive logos and packaging, active use of social media, to brand storytelling that highlights cultural and personal values. These elements strengthen consumer perceptions of product quality and uniqueness.
2. Social media is a highly effective branding tool for MSMEs, as it allows for affordable, interactive promotions that reach a wide range of consumers. MSMEs that consistently create visual and narrative content experience increased awareness and sales.
3. Consistency and authenticity in conveying brand identity have been shown to be key factors in building customer loyalty. MSMEs that are able to maintain alignment between values, visuals, and service tend to have stronger relationships with their consumers.
4. The main challenges in MSME branding include limited human resources, limited branding knowledge, and time and cost constraints. However, a simple yet strategic branding approach can still have a significant impact.

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