



Branding Strategy, Eco-Friendly Packaging, and Product Image in Increasing the Competitiveness of Local MSMEs: A Study in Asinan Village

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze the influence of branding, environmentally friendly packaging, and product image on the competitiveness of MSME products in Asinan Village, Bawen District, Semarang Regency. Effective branding is believed to be able to create emotional connections with consumers, environmentally friendly packaging becomes an added value that is relevant to the sustainability trend of the modern market, and product image plays an important role in shaping consumer perceptions of product quality and excellence. The research approach uses an associative quantitative method with multiple linear regression analysis techniques. A sample of 30 MSME actors was selected by purposive sampling and analyzed using the SPSS version 25 application. The results showed that branding, environmentally friendly packaging, and product image have a positive and significant effect on product competitiveness, both partially and simultaneously. The coefficient of determination (R^2) value of 76.5% indicates the dominant contribution of the three variables to increasing MSME competitiveness. This study provides a practical contribution to village MSME empowerment strategies based on emotional, visual, and market perception values.

Keywords: Branding, Environmentally Friendly Packaging, Product Image, Competitiveness, MSMEs

1. Introduction

As micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) continue to expand Indonesia's economy, the country also adapts to rapid digital transformation brought about by globalisation. The development of the digital economy, however, allows MSMEs to leverage e-commerce, social media, and other digital tools to expand their markets with ease. Studies indicate that social media accelerates marketing and strengthens MSME brand competitiveness, thus widening consumer access and aiding brand recognition [1]. Yet, alongside these optimistic predictions, challenges still persist. Gaps in funding, human resource capacity, and technology utilisation greatly hinder the adaptation of MSMEs to the digital era.

Based on the local potential, local MSMEs are also important in the economic development of the district. Their contribution to improving the standard of living and generating employment opportunities is substantial. By processing local resources and emphasizing local wisdom, MSMEs can produce unique and highly competitive products in both domestic and international markets [2]. Therefore, MSME empowerment is a key strategy in supporting national economic resilience and the development of a community-based, inclusive economy.

However, many rural MSMEs face various obstacles in strengthening their brands and innovating their packaging. Common issues include a lack of understanding of effective

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marketing strategies among business actors, difficulty in obtaining attractive and high-quality packaging materials, and a lack of skills in visually competitive packaging design [3]. These weaknesses often result in MSME products being less competitive in the market, especially when compared to products from larger industries that have more mature marketing and product design resources.

To address these challenges, various general strategies have been developed, including marketing training programs, business incubation, and community-based branding empowerment. Furthermore, branding and product branding strategies have been recognized as key approaches to enhancing the competitive advantage of MSMEs. Having a powerful brand can improve perception, strengthen consumer loyalty, and build hidden value in products offered by MSMEs [4]; [5]. Moreover, adopting eco-friendly consumable designs captures the attention of sustainability-conscious consumers thoughtfully in the marketplace [6].

Various studies have shown that non-material aspects of MSME products such as uniqueness, social connections, and cultural values shape consumer perceptions. In contrast to products from large industries that are perceived as more reliable and homogeneous in quality, MSME products offer individuality and personalization [7]. There is also a perception that MSME products represent a local identity that strengthens the emotional bond between consumers and the product [8].

Given the strategic importance of MSMEs, the government has issued various policies to strengthen this sector. Some of the supported interventions include entrepreneurship training programs and financial assistance, as well as the provision of digital services for MSMEs. These policies are intended to provide the right environment for MSME development and help them compete in a more sophisticated market. Furthermore, policies on digital marketing and marketing from a sustainability framework focus more on innovation related to product design techniques and labels [9].

However, a gap remains between policy and practice. Multifaceted interventions have been developed and implemented, but due to technical and financial constraints, branding and packaging strategies have not been optimally implemented by most MSMEs. It can be seen that most previous research has focused on the macroeconomic and policy levels, while studies from a local microeconomic perspective are still rare. Therefore, there is a gap in the literature examining the impact of branding, eco-friendly packaging, product image, and their impact on MSME competitiveness at the village level.

This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing branding strategies, eco-friendly packaging, and product image as factors influencing the competitiveness of local MSMEs through branding. What is novel in this study is the examination of the impact of these three variables on the competitiveness of MSME products in a village environment that utilizes local potential. This research evaluates the formulated hypotheses through a quantitative survey assessing consumer perceptions concerning MSME products in Asinan Village, Bawen District. The scope is limited to active buyers and consumers of MSME products within the food and craft industries, so that the results can be directed to policy and strategy alternatives aimed at empowering local MSMEs.

In Asinan village, the enhancement of the market competitiveness of MSME products can be collectively achieved through training on branding, implementation of green packaging, and reinforcing the product image. Emotional marketing aims to shape a psychological representation of the product by incorporating local cultural intelligence, while at the same time, green packaging endeavours to achieve value addition through beauty and public concern for ethical production standards added value through attractive product aesthetics and socially responsible production ethics [10]. The synergy of the two factors is assumed to enhance the image of the product and increase its acceptability and competitiveness in local and regional markets [11].

his research seeks to assess how certain aspects like brand (X1), green packaging (X2), product image (X3) impact the MSME product competitiveness (Y) in Asinan Village. The study is quantitative in nature and applies multiple linear regression techniques. The primary data was collected using questionnaires targeted at the active MSME participants in Asinan Village. The analysis was performed with SPSS version 25 software to evaluate the impact of each factor contributing to the competitiveness of the product [12].

MSMEs in Asinan Village are expected to enhance their market position by adopting comprehensive branding as well as sustainable and locally sourced packaging due to rising consumer demand for sustainability and local distinctiveness [13].

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Foundations

This study analyses existing theories on branding, eco-friendly packaging, product image, and their relevance to the competitiveness of MSMEs from different angles. Perhaps the most relevant of these frameworks is the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). As proposed in TPB, consumer behaviour results from a combination of three components: attitudes toward the behaviour in question, subjective social norms, and perceived control over the behaviour [14]. In this instance, branding and product packaging provided by MSMEs strongly mould consumer attitudes and perceptions which ultimately drives the decision-making process.

Moreover, the importance of communicating an effective message to the audiences reinforces the relevance of marketing communications theory. In this theory, a brand is viewed not only as an epitome of a product but also as an identity which entails a means of delivering value and experiences to the consumers. Viewed as part of visual communication, packaging fulfils an essential function in strengthening brand messages as well as developing positive perceptions about the brand [14].

Brands and packaging employ imagery to portray a product, and consequently, consumers' perceptions are shaped by their interactions with the product, the product's related information, and visual symbols alongside the packaging. Hence, effective branding aids in establishing and increasing a product's prestige while giving it a competitive advantage in the market.

2.2 Emotional Branding

Emotional branding pertains to approaches made to establish a connection on emotional levels with consumers and brands. Concerning the emotional branding of products offered by micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), the technique is imperative in fostering deeper commitment via storytelling, local stories, and the culture associated with the brand. Pasaribu [15] noted that emotional branding encompasses aspects of authenticity, consistency of brand messages, and the creation of relevant experiences, which differentiate MSME products from those offered by large-scale competitors. When consumers connect emotionally with a particular product, there is a high likelihood that they will become brand loyalists and advocates.

2.3 Eco-Friendly Packaging

Product packaging is a crucial part of a brand's communication strategy. Eco-friendly packaging not only reflects a company's social responsibility but also provides added value, relevant to growing consumer awareness of sustainability issues [16]. In the eyes of customers, the incorporation of minimalist design, sustainable practices, and the use of biodegradable materials further strengthens brand reputation and enhances perceived quality. The competitive edge offered by eco-friendly packaging is advantageous for both local and international markets for MSMEs.

2.4 Brand Image

A product's image incorporates a consumer's perception formulated by their experiences with the product, expectations, and the associated brand equity. As demonstrated by Lestari et al. [17] and Winarti et al. [18], product image reputation correlates positively with

consumer loyalty. We may conclude that MSMEs with well-defined and appealing product images can easily attract consumers and sustain market preference with respect to their offerings.

2.5 Competitiveness of MSMEs

The growth of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) is influenced by competition, product redesign, adaptive marketing, innovation, emerging technologies, and changes in market conditions [13]; [18]. Concerning the sustainability of MSMEs, their 'green' branding strategy impacts market perception, directly affects market visibility, and plays a key role in maintaining competitiveness captioned 'green' makes. These adaptations directly reshape their brand equity in online and offline markets and play a key role in maintaining competitiveness [14].

2.6 Hypothesis Development

In this investigation, we formulate hypotheses in order to analyse the relationships established in earlier empirical studies within the scope of this research. These hypotheses are listed below:

H1: Strategic branding enhances the competitive advantage of MSME products.

H2: Eco-friendly packaging enhances competitiveness in marketing MSME products.

H3: Product image enhances competitiveness in MSME products.

H4: Strategic branding, eco-friendly packaging, and product image together determine the competitive advantage of MSME products.

This hypothesis rests upon the foundational assumption that the latter variables interact with and enhance one another in deriving competitive advantage. Branding elements that evoke emotions, sustainability as inherent in packaging, and perception embedded within the image of the product are believed to synergistically influence the competitive position of MSME products [14].

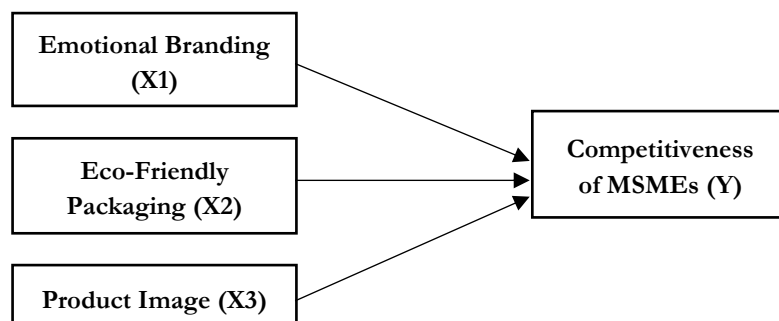


Figure 1. Research Thinking Framework

This study further contributes to the literature by proposing a contextualised sustainable model which has been absent in prior scholarship. Moreover, the model builds on the discussion and theories from the literature review identifying emotional branding, eco-friendly packaging, and product image as critical factors that improve the competitiveness of MSMEs.

3. Research Methods

This study aims to analyse whether the brand image, packaging of products labelled as environmentally friendly, and perception of products affect the competitiveness of local MSMEs. The scope of the study was limited to MSMEs within Bawen District of Semarang Regency. Both the research questions and hypotheses which had been developed before the study were answered through quantitative methods. In this study, primary data was obtained through conducting surveys to the consumers of the chosen MSME products that met certain criteria. This method was chosen because it is useful for accurately portraying the relationship among some variables in a systematic, objective, and quantifiable manner [19].

3.1 Research Design

This study utilised a quantitative causal-comparative design approach in an attempt to ascertain the degree of influence independent variables—branding, packaging, and product image—have on the competitiveness of MSME products, the dependent variable. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire employing a 5-point Likert scale aimed at capturing the respondents' perceptions pertaining to each research variable. This approach enables the researcher to measure and analyse the direct and indirect relationships among the variables under consideration [20].

3.2 Population and Sample

The subjects in this study were the consumers of MSME manufactured products located in Asinan Village. The sample was obtained using a purposive sampling technique, which had the following criteria (1) consumers who had already bought the product a minimum of two times, and (2) residing in the Semarang Regency. The minimum sample size was calculated using the Slovin formula with a 5% error margin as well as taking into account the effectiveness of regression analysis which needed a proportional sample size relative to the number of variable indicators.

3.3 Data Collection Technique

Questionnaires were utilised both online and in person to collect primary data. The questionnaire consisted of two parts: the first part contained demographic questions, and the second part measured the research variables using items structured based on theoretical indicators of each construct. The questionnaire's validity was tested through content validity by soliciting expert opinions, and construct validity through exploratory factor analysis.

3.4 Operational Definition of Variables

- a. Branding Strategy (X1): Measured based on indicators from Pasaribu et al., [15] which include brand authenticity, message consistency, and the strength of local stories or narratives.
- b. Eco-Friendly Packaging (X2): Refers to the principles of sustainability in packaging materials and design [16].
- c. Product Image (X3): Defined as consumer perceptions of product quality, symbolic value, and identity [17].
- d. Product Competitiveness (Y): Measured through perceived added value, consumer preference, and loyalty [21].

Table 1. Variable Indicator

Variable	Indicator
Branding (X1)	Product Narrative
	Logo and Visual Identity
	Emotional Value
	Emotional Appeal
	Brand Communication Consistency
Eco-Friendly Packaging (X2)	Environmentally Friendly Materials
	Packaging Aesthetics
	Informasi pada Kemasan
	Information on Packaging
Product Image (X3)	Packaging Function
	Perception of Quality
	Product Reputation
	Consumer confidence
Competitiveness of MSME Products (Y)	Image Reference
	Consumer Perception of Products
	Product Differentiation
	Consumer Loyalty
	Increased Sales
	Attraction in the Local Market

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Respondent Description

MSME consumers in rural areas, particularly Asinan Village, exhibit significant demographic diversity. Respondents in this study were primarily adults aged 25 to 50. The majority had at least a high school education, with diverse occupations including civil servants, farmers, traders, and housewives [22]; [23]. The relatively high educational profile among these consumers enables them to be aware of the importance of product quality and brand values, including informative and attractive packaging design.

The frequency of MSME product purchases indicates that consumers tend to be loyal to local products, particularly during specific occasions such as market days, village events, or discount promotions. This demonstrates active involvement in supporting local products as part of their daily consumption culture [24].

Furthermore, demographic background also influences preferences for branding and packaging. Younger consumers are more responsive to innovations in packaging design and brand visual communication strategies. Meanwhile, older consumers place greater value on the product narrative and track record of MSMEs [25].

Furthermore, consumer behavior is also influenced by product type. Food consumers place greater emphasis on hygiene, taste, and price, while craft consumers are more interested in the aesthetics, unique design, and cultural symbolism of the product [26]; [27].

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics Results of Research Variables

No.	Variable	N	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Std Deviasi
1.	Emotional Branding (X1)	30	4.23	3.70	4.70	0.29
2.	Eco-Friendly Packaging (X2)	30	4.10	3.60	4.60	0.31
3	Product Image (X3)	30	4.28	3.80	4.80	0.26
4	Competitiveness of MSMEs (Y)	30	4.35	3.80	4.80	0.28

4.2 Validity and Reliability Test

Validity and reliability testing were conducted to ensure that the research instrument accurately measured the intended variables. Validity analysis results showed that most items had item-total correlation values (r) above 0.3, indicating statistical validity [28]. For reliability, Cronbach's Alpha calculations showed values above 0.7 for all constructs, indicating the instrument's reliability.

Construct validity was confirmed using exploratory factor analysis (EFA). Items with factor loadings greater than 0.5 were retained, and EFA results indicated that each construct had a factor structure consistent with its theoretical definition. Challenges in validating instruments in a local marketing context primarily relate to respondents' understanding of technical terms and socio-cultural influences on item interpretation [29]. If any item is not valid or reliable, it can lead to deviations in data interpretation and errors in drawing conclusions.

4.3 Classical Assumption Test

Classical assumptions were tested to ensure the validity of the regression model. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test showed that the data were normally distributed. No multicollinearity was found with a VIF value <10 , and the Glejser test showed no heteroscedasticity. In this study, the classical assumption tests used include the normality test, multicollinearity test, and heteroscedasticity test. The normality test used the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The results of the normality test that have been carried out show a large Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.200. This result has a value greater than 0.05 and is proven to meet the requirements, meaning that the research variables are normally distributed. Multicollinearity testing is useful for determining whether each independent variable has a relationship or not. In conducting this test, the SPSS program is used and looks at the Tolerance value and VIF value.

4.4 Multiple Linear Regression

Multiple linear regression was used to test the effect of branding (X1) and eco-friendly packaging (X2) on product competitiveness (Y). A constant of 0.984 indicates the product's competitiveness when X1, X2, and X3 are zero. Coefficient X1 = 0.354: A one-unit increase in branding score increases product competitiveness by 0.354 (with X2 and X3 held constant). Coefficient X2 = 0.312: A one-unit increase in packaging score increases competitiveness by 0.312.

Table 3. Results of Multiple Linear Regression Tests

Model	Coefficient	t-count	Sig.
(Constant)	0.984	-	-
Emotional Branding (X1)	0.354	3.102	0.004
Eco-Friendly Packaging (X2)	0.312	2.789	0.009
Product Image (X3)	0.376	3.551	0.001

4.5 Partial Significance Test (t-Test)

The t-test shows that all three variables have a significant partial influence on competitiveness (p-value <0.05). Meanwhile, the F-test shows that all three variables simultaneously have a significant influence on competitiveness [1]. This confirms that branding, packaging, and product image collectively play a significant role in shaping consumer perceptions of the competitiveness of MSME products.

Branding (X1), Environmentally Friendly Packaging (X2), and Product Image (X3) partially have a positive and significant effect on the competitiveness of MSME products (Y). This means that each independent variable makes a real contribution to increasing competitiveness.

Table 4. t-Test Results

Variabel	t-hitung	Sig.	Keterangan
Branding (X1)	3.102	0.004	Signifikan ($p < 0.05$)
Eco-Friendly Packaging (X2)	2.789	0.009	Signifikan ($p < 0.05$)
Product Image (X3)	3.551	0.001	Signifikan ($p < 0.05$)

4.6 Simultaneous Significance Test (F Test)

Simultaneously, branding, environmentally friendly packaging, and product image significantly influence the competitiveness of MSME products. The overall regression model is able to explain the relationship between variables very well, as indicated by the strong simultaneous significance value and high coefficient of determination.

Table 5. F Test Results

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	36.942	3	12.314	39.895	.000
Residual	11.758	26	0.452		
Total	48.700	29			

4.7 Coefficient of Determination Test

Based on the table above, the R (Correlation Coefficient) of 0.875 indicates a strong correlation between the independent and dependent variables. An R Square of 0.765 means that 76.5% of the variation in product competitiveness can be explained by branding, environmentally friendly packaging, and product image. The Adjusted R Square of 0.765 takes into account the number of predictors and sample size, and still indicates a strong model. The Std. Error of the Estimate shows the magnitude of the prediction error in the model, which is ± 0.642 .

Table 6. Results of the Determination Coefficient Test

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.875 ^a	.765	.742	.642

a. Predictors: (Constant), Emotional Branding, Eco-Friendly Packaging , Product Image

4.8 Discussion

Statistical analysis, particularly multiple linear regression, enables scholars to determine what factors influence the competitiveness of MSME products. Within the scope of this research, branding strategy, eco-friendly packaging, and product image were tested for their impacts on competitiveness using a regression model. The regression results confirm the existence of a significant positive relationship between branding and packaging variables and competitiveness. This is corroborated by prior studies which claim that effective brand marketing and novel packaging boost the prominence and market value of MSME products [19].

The relevant action is MSMEs must focus on creating brand strategies that are psychological, personal, emotional as well as aesthetically appealing and eco-conscious in their packaging. Moreover, a coherent product image enhances customer retention and loyalty while strengthening competitiveness both locally and in the virtual marketplace.

Analyzing the interpretation of regression results relies heavily on the significance of the metrics p-value and R^2 . In this study's case, the p-value of each independent variable was below the 0.05 mark which indicates the variable's influence on competitiveness is within the statistically significant range. A high R^2 value, above 0.765, means that the regression model explains more than 76.5% of the variation in MSME product competitiveness.

The results of this study validate that branding, packaging, and product image go beyond visual or communicative elements, serving as strategic factors that influence market perception and competitive positioning. These results support the notion that MSMEs must prioritise enhancing the non-physical attributes of their products.

The results of the research were validated externally by comparing them with prior studies. Akilie's study [16] demonstrated that eco-friendly packaging adds substantial value in the context of purchasing behaviour, especially with the growing concern for sustainability among consumers. Also, Pasaribu et al. [15] emphasised that emotional branding creates a connection between consumers and products which bears a considerable impact on customer loyalty.

In the region, the findings of this study aligned with Santoso et al., [21], who found that MSMEs managing narrative and promotional packaging compete better in the market. Thus, the incorporation of emotional branding and sustainable packaging design offers an overarching strategy for the development of local products.

5. Conclusion

As an example in policy making or field work interpretation, research gaps need to be accurately filled as policies need to be built on unbiased gaps. This investigation thoroughly studies regression analysis, noteworthy variables, and data triangulation in order to establish a solid empirical framework which helps raise the competitiveness of MSMEs through branding strategies, eco-friendly packaging, and product image enhancement. The utilisation of proper statistical frameworks allows targeted strategy design that drives sustainable growth for MSMEs.

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