

## Wingko Fitri Demak Brand Development Strategy in Facing Competition in the Digital Era

Dita Kurniawati

STAI Islamic Centre Demak, Indonesia; watinia470@gmail.com

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the brand development strategy implemented by Wingko Fitri Demak, a micro-enterprise from Demak that produces regional specialties, in facing competition in the digital era. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were obtained through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation. The results of the study indicate that although Wingko Fitri has strengths in terms of product quality and distinctive local values, the branding strategy implemented is still limited and unstructured. The use of social media and marketplaces has been carried out, but has not been optimal in building a strong brand narrative and consistent digital interactions. The main challenges faced include limited human resources and understanding of digital branding. This study recommends the need to strengthen brand identity, optimize digital channels, and branding training to increase business competitiveness. These findings are expected to be a strategic reference for other UMKM in designing brand development that is relevant to the digital era. Opportunities for locality-based brand strengthening are still very open. The attachment of cultural values, the story behind the business, and the uniqueness of the product are important assets that can be differentiators amidst increasingly competitive competition in the digital ecosystem.

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**Corresponding Author:**

Dita Kurniawati

STAI Islamic Centre Demak, Indonesia; watinia470@gmail.com

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The introduction should briefly place the study in a broad context and highlight why it is important. It should define the purpose of the work and its significance. The current state of the research field should be reviewed carefully, and key publications cited. Please highlight controversial and diverging hypotheses when necessary. Finally, briefly mention the main aim of the work and highlight the principal conclusions. As far as possible, please keep the introduction comprehensible to scientists outside your particular field of research. References should be cited as (Kamba, 2018) or (Marchlewska et al., 2019) or (Cichocka, 2016; Hidayat & Khalika, 2019; Ikhwan, 2019; Madjid, 2002) or (Miller & Josephs, 2009, p. 12) or Rakhmat (1989). See the end of the document for further details on references. Technical terms should

be defined. Symbols, abbreviations, and acronyms should be defined the first time they are used. All tables and figures should be cited in numerical order.

In today's digital era, many aspects of human life have undergone major changes, including in the business world. Not only large companies are affected by this transformation, but also micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), which are an important part of the economies of many countries, including Indonesia. With the rapid development of information and communication technology, businesses must quickly adapt to the new ecosystem. Social media and the internet have become important tools for building relationships with customers, creating brand image, and expanding market reach across geographic boundaries (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

People's consumption patterns have changed as a result of the advancement of digital technology. They now prefer to shop online and take advantage of various digital platforms to get information about the items they are looking for. This means that businesses should not only concentrate on product quality, but also on the way the product is communicated and positioned in the minds of consumers. In situations like this, maintaining existence and increasing competitiveness in the midst of fierce market competition is one of the important strategies for developing a brand (Indrajit, 2020).

Contributing 60.3% to GDP and significant labor absorption, MSMEs play an important role in the Indonesian economy (BPS, 2023). However, MSMEs are also the most vulnerable sector to the dynamics of global change, especially in terms of technology adaptation and management capabilities. Many small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) are still unable to make optimal use of digital technology to support their operations and marketing activities.

The biggest challenge facing MSMEs in the digital era is how to build and develop brands effectively. Competition does not only come from local players, but also from products outside the region and even abroad that enter through digital platforms. Without a strong and consistent brand development strategy, MSME actors will find it difficult to survive in the long term (Tambunan, 2019). In the midst of these challenges, Demak Regency is present as one of the regions that has the potential for distinctive local products, one of which is wingko tripe.

Wingko is a traditional food made from coconut and sticky rice, which has become an icon of the region's typical souvenirs. Among the various wingko producers that exist, Wingko Fitri which comes from Tempuran Village, is one of the most prominent and has been widely known by the community. Its long-standing existence, distinctive flavors and the diversity of flavor variants offered make Wingko Fitri a strong brand at the local level.

Over the past few years, the intensity of business competition has increased significantly with the emergence of new business actors who apply a more modern and adaptive branding approach to technological advances. Similar products are starting to circulate, both from the surrounding area and from outside the region, by utilizing digital marketing strategies to expand market reach. This condition is a strategic challenge for Wingko Fitri in its efforts to maintain brand relevance and consumer loyalty in the midst of increasingly complex and competitive competition dynamics.

Brand development is not solely limited to visual elements such as logos or packaging designs, but also includes more essential dimensions, such as the preparation of the brand narrative, the core values to be conveyed, and the consistency of communication with consumers. In today's digital age, interactions built through social media, websites, and *e-commerce platforms* are a strategic component in creating a strong, authentic, and competitive brand image (Kotler et al., 2021; Hearn et al., 2020).

According to initial observations, Wingko Fitri has tried to make changes by opening a social media account and using marketplaces to sell her goods. However, there is no systematic and long-lasting brand development plan. This can be seen from inconsistent digital promotional activities and the lack of a compelling brand narrative on these communication channels.

This condition shows that there is a gap between the potential possessed and the strategy implemented. Limitations in digital branding and marketing management knowledge are often the main obstacles for MSMEs like Wingko Fitri. In fact, the right branding strategy can be the main

differentiator in attracting consumer interest and creating long-term loyalty (Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs, 2022).

This research is important to carry out considering that there have not been many studies that specifically discuss brand development strategies in traditional food MSMEs in areas such as Demak. Most previous research has only highlighted aspects of digital marketing in general without delving deeper into how brands are built and developed in local contexts that have cultural distinctiveness (Susanti, 2021; Fadilah, 2020).

Therefore, this research is here to fill this gap by delving deeply into the strategies carried out by Wingko Fitri in developing brands in the midst of a challenging digital era. This research will also look at how business owners interpret their brands, the challenges faced, and the efforts that have been made to maintain their existence.

The uniqueness of this research lies in the qualitative approach used to explore internal dynamics in branding strategies that cannot be revealed through a quantitative approach alone. Through in-depth interviews and direct observations, researchers can understand the strategies, perceptions, and values that shape the brand identity of Wingko Fitri.

The main purpose of this study is to analyze the brand development strategies applied by Wingko Fitri in facing competition in the digital era. This research also aims to identify various factors that support and hinder the development process of the brand, as well as provide relevant recommendations to increase the effectiveness of the strategy in the future.

The phenomenon of increasing business competition in the context of digitalization, as well as the challenges faced by MSMEs in building brand strength, is an interesting issue that deserves in-depth research. In this context, the strategy carried out by Wingko Fitri Demak attracted the attention of researchers, considering its position as one of the regional food producers that has existed for a long time, but now has to adapt to the dynamics of the digital market that continues to develop. The researcher's interest is based on curiosity about how Wingko Fitri responds to change and competition through its branding approach.

Therefore, this research is directed to comprehensively study how Wingko Fitri's brand development strategy functions in maintaining its sustainability and competitiveness in the midst of the transformation of the digital marketing landscape. The results of this research are expected not only to contribute to the development of science in the field of MSME marketing management, but also to become an inspiring practical reference for other MSME actors in designing adaptive and relevant brand development strategies in the digital era.

Brand development strategy is a series of systematic efforts to build, strengthen, and maintain a brand's identity and image to remain relevant and competitive in the market (Kotler & Keller, 2016). According to Aaker (2020), brand development does not only focus on visual elements such as logos and brand names, but also includes brand identity, brand personality, brand positioning, and brand equity. The right strategy can increase brand value in the eyes of consumers, expand market reach, and create long-term loyalty.

For Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), brand development must be carried out with an adaptive and efficient approach, considering limited resources and access to technology. Research by Wijaya (2021) states that MSMEs that are able to consistently implement brand development strategies are better able to survive in fierce competition, especially when supported by a strong and emotional brand narrative.

Digital transformation has changed the way consumers search, compare, and buy products. This makes business competition more open and no longer limited geographically. According to Indrajit (2020), business actors now have to compete not only with local businesses, but also with national and global brands that are present through digital platforms. For this reason, the ability to adapt and integrate digital strategies is a key element in maintaining business sustainability. Meanwhile, Tambunan (2019) emphasized that MSMEs tend to lag behind in the digitalization aspect, so they need special assistance and strategies so as not to be eliminated from market competition. The use of

technology must be accompanied by the ability to build a strong brand identity to differentiate itself from competitors.

Local brands like Wingko Fitri have a competitive advantage in terms of authenticity, traditional values, and emotional closeness to local consumers. According to Kotler et al. (2021), the strength of local brands can be capitalized through storytelling strategies, packaging that reflects culture, and exploration of local values as part of brand positioning.

Research by Fadilah (2020) shows that MSMEs that elevate local identity in branding strategies are able to create higher customer loyalty. Local elements such as regional names, hereditary recipes, and visualizations of local culture are differentiators that are difficult for large competitors to imitate.

The digital era, social media and other digital platforms have become strategic tools in building relationships with consumers and conveying brand messages. Hearn et al. (2020) explain that digital branding encompasses the entire process of brand communication through digital channels, including content creation, visual branding, consumer interaction, and online reputation management.

The Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs (2022) also emphasized the importance of digital transformation in MSME branding activities. Through digitalization, businesses can increase product visibility, expand the market, and get feedback quickly from customers.

## 2. METHODS

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach to deeply understand the brand development strategy implemented by Wingko Fitri in facing competition in the digital era. This approach was chosen because it is able to explore complex and contextual phenomena, and provides space for in-depth interpretation of the strategies and experiences of MSME actors in the branding process (Sugiyono, 2022; Creswell & Poth, 2021).

The research was carried out in Tempuran Village, Demak Regency, Central Java, which is the location of Wingko Fitri's business. The subjects in this study consisted of business owners, two marketing and production employees, and three regular consumers. The selection of informants was carried out by purposive sampling, which is based on the consideration that they have relevant and in-depth information related to brand development strategies (Miles et al., 2020).

Data is collected through three main techniques, namely: a) In-depth interviews: conducted in a semi-structured manner to business owners and employees, as well as customers to obtain data on perceptions, strategies, and challenges in brand development. b) Participatory observation: carried out by directly observing business activities, promotional strategies, social media use, and the process of interaction with customers. c) Documentation: includes analysis of Wingko Fitri's official social media accounts, digital content, product packaging design, and other digital promotional archives.

The data was analyzed using a thematic analysis approach as described by Braun & Clarke (2019), which includes the process of identifying, coding, and grouping the main themes of the data obtained. The analysis was carried out systematically with the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing as described by Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña (2020). To ensure the validity of the data, source triangulation techniques and techniques are used, namely comparing the results of interviews with observations and documentation. In addition, member checking is carried out by providing the results of initial interpretation to informants to ensure the suitability of the meaning and accuracy of the information (Gunawan, 2021).

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This research produced findings obtained through in-depth interviews, direct observations in the field, and analysis of Wingko Fitri's documents and digital media. The results of the research are elaborated into several key themes that describe brand development strategies and the challenges faced in the context of digitalization.

### **3.1. Traditional Brand Power and Customer Loyalty**

Wingko Fitri has been known as a typical food producer from Tempuran Village, Demak, with a long business history since the early 1990s. The main product, wingko tripe, has a distinctive taste and various variants such as original, chocolate, durian, and pandan. Based on interviews with owners and customers, it is known that the main strength of this brand lies in the consistent taste, quality of raw materials, as well as the nostalgic value inherent in the product. Wingko products are very famous products from Semarang. However, with various efforts, the owner's innovation can compete with other areas around Demak.

Customers feel that Wingko Fitri presents an authentic taste that is difficult to find in similar products. This power is still not capitalized optimally in the form of brand storytelling or brand narratives that can be raised through digital media. Brand identity is still focused on the product, not on the value or story behind it. However, many customers are still loyal to buy and feel the authenticity of the taste of Wingko Fitri Demak.

### **3.2. Limited Digital Adaptation**

This business has tried to enter the digital world through the creation of Instagram and Facebook accounts, as well as selling products through marketplaces such as Shopee and Tokopedia. However, based on observations and interviews with employees, digital implementation is still reactive and unstructured. There is no content calendar, the visual narrative is not consistent, and the use of digital interactive features (such as live, reels, video testimonials) has not been utilized optimally. The content uploaded is also still dominant in the form of product images without explaining the value, manufacturing process, or local uniqueness. As a result, interactions with customers are very limited and there is no effort to build community or emotional attachment through digital platforms.

### **3.3. Limitations of Digital Branding Knowledge**

The obstacle found is the lack of understanding of the owners and staff regarding modern branding strategies, especially digital-based ones. There is no special team that handles digital marketing, everything is done by the owner himself with the help of makeshift employees. This causes branding activities to not be carried out strategically and sustainably. This results in limitations of owners and staff in knowing digital branding. According to the owner, the main obstacle is time, effort, and limited access to digital branding training. This is in line with the findings of Fadilah (2020), that many MSMEs do not have human resources with adequate branding competencies.

### **3.4. Locality-Based Branding Opportunities**

While the limitations of digital are obvious, the study also found great opportunities to develop brands based on local strength. Wingko Fitri products have uniqueness in terms of ingredients, family recipes, and cultural values of the Demak area that can be raised as a brand identity. If developed with the right digital strategy, this local value can be a strong differentiator (unique selling point) in the midst of competition with foreign products that do not necessarily have an emotional bond with local consumers. The quality ingredients obtained from the Demak area, from quality ingredients and in the hands of voters who have hereditary family recipes have been tested. So that the wingko Fitri product was created which is a snack product from Demak

### **3.5. Competitive Challenges in the Digital Era**

The current competition does not only come from other wingko manufacturers around Demak, but also from outside the region who take advantage of the power of *visual branding* and *digital marketing*. Some competitors feature modern packaging, professional photos, and endorsement strategies by *food influencers*. This condition makes the Wingko Fitri brand less competitive in terms of

visual and digital appeal. In fact, according to Kotler et al. (2021), in the digital ecosystem, visual perception and emotional closeness play an important role in shaping customer loyalty.

## Discussion

The results of the study show that Wingko Fitri's brand development strategy is still in its early stages and has not been built through systematic planning. This can be seen from the absence of a strong and structured brand identity in visual, communication, and the use of digital media. The advantages of products that have been known locally have not been followed by the development of brand value that is able to attract a wider market segment.

Based on the perspective of *brand development theory according to David Aaker* (2020), a brand development strategy must include four main elements: *brand awareness*, *brand association*, *brand loyalty*, and *perceived quality*. If associated with the condition of Wingko Fitri, brand awareness has been formed among local consumers, but has not yet expanded to the digital market and outside the region. Brand associations are still limited to "typical Demak souvenirs" without a distinctive or emotional brand narrative that is able to build long-term attachment.

The fundamental weakness is the lack of brand *storytelling*. Wingko Fitri products have a high narrative potential as a traditional food with local history and cultural values. Authentic and consistent *brand storytelling* will help build differentiation and emotional closeness with consumers. However, wingko Fitri Demak has not yet raised a brand communication strategy such as on social media for digital promotion.

Visually, brand design elements such as logos, packaging, and digital displays have not been developed to reflect a strong and professional identity. Wingko Fitri needs to rebrand *visuals* to adapt to modern market expectations without eliminating the traditional elements that are its main attraction. An attractive, consistent, and easily recognizable visual appearance is essential to increase brand trust and credibility.

Distribution and communication channels, the use of digital platforms is still very limited. Social media accounts have not been optimally used to build a community, convey a brand message, or improve interaction with consumers. In fact, social media is the main means in effective and efficient MSME digital marketing. The absence of a website can be an obstacle to market expansion, even though in the trend of online shopping this is a strategic opportunity that must be taken advantage of.

Furthermore, there is no clear market segmentation strategy yet. Wingko Fitri products are still marketed in general without a segmentative approach based on demographics, psychographics, or consumer behavior. In fact, product differentiation such as flavor variants, packaging sizes, or special editions can be used to reach different market segments, such as young tourists, traditional culinary lovers, or foreign markets that like ethnic products.

Digital literacy and branding awareness of business actors are still low in the context of organizations. This has an impact on the lack of strategic initiatives in innovating, both in product packaging, promotional techniques, and customer experience. Therefore, collaboration with external parties is urgently needed, external parties such as local governments, academics, or MSME consultants to assist the digital transformation and branding process.

The challenges faced by Wingko Fitri also reflect the condition of most MSMEs in Indonesia who are in the process of adapting to the changing digital marketing paradigm. If Wingko Fitri is able to synergize local strengths such as authentic taste, product history, and community engagement with the right digital branding approach, then the opportunity to expand the market, strengthen customer loyalty, and increase product added value is huge.

Suggested brand development strategies include:

1. Remapping of brand identity that represents traditional values and product quality.
2. Strengthening brand narrative through social media, packaging, and digital content.
3. Branding visual design such as packaging displays, logos are made digital to be more modern and consistent.

4. Strategically activate digital channels : Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and local/national marketplaces.
5. Digital marketing and branding training for internal teams to have the ability to manage marketing strategies independently.
6. Promotional collaborations with tourism players, local influencers, and the culinary community to expand the brand's reach.
7. Product innovations that are relevant to modern consumer preferences, such as travel-friendly packaging, healthy products (less sugar), or seasonal editions.

By implementing a planned, sustainable, and adaptive strategy to digital developments, Wingko Fitri can transform itself from a traditional local product to a leading culinary brand that is known nationally and even globally.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research, it can be concluded that the brand development strategy implemented by Wingko Fitri Demak is still in its early stages and has not been implemented in a planned and sustainable manner. The main advantage of this business lies in the quality of products, the peculiarity of taste, and the traditional values that are strongly attached to local identity. Nevertheless, these strengths have not been fully capitalized into a strong and consistent brand strategy, especially in the digital realm.

Digital adaptation efforts such as the use of social media and marketplaces have been carried out, but they are still sporadic and have not been supported by strong brand narratives, consistent visual content, and two-way interactions that build emotional closeness with consumers. Limited human resources and understanding of digital branding are the main obstacles in the development of this brand. Nevertheless, the opportunity for locality-based brand strengthening is still very open. The attachment of cultural values, the story behind the business, and the uniqueness of the product are important assets that can be differentiators in the midst of increasingly competitive competition in the digital ecosystem.

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