

Maximizing the Role of Design in Building a Brand Identity in SMEs through Digital Platform

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Abstract

In the increasingly competitive era of digital business, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) face significant challenges in building strong brand identities, especially on digital platforms where competition is fierce and consumer expectations are constantly evolving. While brand design serves as a critical tool for differentiation and consumer attraction, many SMEs underestimate its strategic importance, particularly in leveraging social media for effective product promotion and audience engagement. This research highlights the urgent need for SMEs to optimize their brand design strategies to address these gaps, emphasizing that a strong visual identity is not merely aesthetic but pivotal in driving competitive advantage. This study aims to explore the optimization of brand design as a strategic approach to enhance brand awareness and consumer engagement in digital promotions. Using a qualitative approach, the research incorporates purposive sampling of SMEs based on criteria such as business age, product type, and digital platform utilization. Data collection methods include direct observations, in-depth interviews with business owners, and literature reviews on social media branding theories. The findings reveal that consistent, responsive, and user-oriented brand design is critical for establishing a robust brand identity. Furthermore, distinctive visual elements paired with compelling storytelling significantly enhance brand awareness and cultivate long-term customer loyalty. The study underscores that SMEs embracing strategic brand design are better positioned to compete in dynamic digital markets, offering practical insights for sustainable business growth.

Keywords: brand design, brand identity, SMEs, digital

1. Introduction

In today's digital era, competition between SMEs is very tight, plus they have to adapt to market changes and consumer behavior. Although SMEs have many important roles in economic growth as reported by the site written by Kadin.id (2024) it is stated that in 2023 there will be 66 million SMEs, and 61% of SMEs contribute to Indonesia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). SMEs also help create jobs for around 117 million people or 97% of the total number of workers.

However, new challenges have emerged to maintain business continuity. The many changes in market trends and building brand identity are new challenges in today's modern era. Starting from limited resources, minimal understanding of digital marketing and the many competitors selling the same products, they must continue to innovate products and build brand identity on a product brand.

Brand identity is how a brand can be remembered and immediately recognized by potential consumers. Design in brand identity includes name, design/image, story, symbol, experience, service, taste and so on which become advantages and differentiators from other competitors.

2. Literature Review

Kapferer (2019) noted that in the digital era, attractive visual design has become a very valuable asset to increase user engagement. Even Lindstrom (2018) highlighted that effective design not only attracts attention but also creates a meaningful experience for consumers. As a result, unique and consistent visual design is the key to differentiating brands from competitors (Underhill, 2014). The introduction of branding and brand identity is very closely related to each other. According to Kotler and Armstrong, a brand is a promise offered by a seller to a buyer, where the promise contains specific properties, benefits, and services consistently. The brand includes various aspects consisting of names, signs, terms, symbols and designs whose main purpose is to introduce and differentiate from competitors. Meanwhile, the definition of brand identity according to Wheeler (2018) in the book *Designing Brand Identity*, brand identity is a strategic business tool that is able to take advantage of every opportunity to increase awareness, strengthen recognition, convey uniqueness and quality, and express competitive advantage. From the opinions and definitions explained by the experts, it can be seen that a brand is a way and effort for a product to be remembered by consumers by using various design elements such as colors,

symbols, signs, and names, while brand identity is a strategy carried out to build that memory so that it sticks tightly to consumers. Improving brand identity strategy is a challenge that must be passed for every seller. The main task of a brand is to convince consumers to choose the products we sell by highlighting the uniqueness and value of the product (Prasetyo, 2013).

For this reason, business actors must always be active in providing interaction for each consumer. The more consumers who provide feedback on the business brand, the closer the opportunity to build a brand to be better known. In this digital era, it has given birth to a new challenge in building a good brand identity. Technological developments offer many conveniences in building an attractive brand image for customers. Wallace (2012) stated that social media activation allows brands to connect directly with customers through activities such as email blasts, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. Social media platforms have their own advantages in supporting brand identity strategies. Instagram, for example, is a visual platform that is very suitable for businesses that want to evoke customer feelings and provide visual ideas (Lim & Yazdanifard, 2014). Facebook offers various business tools such as Facebook Pages, Groups, and Events for customer interaction, as well as Facebook Ads to run highly targeted advertising campaigns, which have proven significant in increasing brand awareness (Diamond, 2018; Sijabat, 2021). In addition, TikTok is an effective publicity tool with high customer engagement potential. TikTok is also able to build trust between producers and buyers through video content that shows products directly (Nair et al., 2022). The use of social media is not only efficient but also offers extensive opportunities in managing information to predict certain outcomes without having to institutionalize traditional market mechanisms (Pertiwi & Irwansyah, 2020). Digital platforms, such as social media, have provided new opportunities for SMEs to reach a wider audience and build more personal connections with consumers. However, SMEs still face challenges in optimizing their brand design on digital platforms. This study aims to dig deeper into how effective brand design can increase consumer engagement and build a strong brand identity for SMEs in the digital era.

3. Materials and methods

This study applies the literature review method by searching for references from journals, articles, books, websites with keywords brand design, brand identity, UMKM, digital. and a qualitative approach with in-depth interviews and direct observation, then the data collection technique is carried out through purposive sampling, where UMKM OHU Corndog is selected as the subject of the study.

3.1 Research Design

Branding in a business can play a role in building the reputation of a brand/brand marketing with a very broad scope, including business name, image, story, symbol, term, user experience, service, taste, price offered, and other things that can influence the user's perspective on a branding.

The main goal of marketing is to increase product visibility in order to reach consumers widely and quickly. Therefore, branding is very important. Through branding, we can understand the customer's perspective on our products. Branding also helps customers to recognize the products we offer easily, understand why they should choose our products, and know what kind of experience we offer. In addition, effective branding will ensure that our products are easily remembered and used by customers all the time. Branding also plays a role in increasing customer loyalty and helps us determine the position of the product we want to display in the market.

Reported from Infinite Learning (Institute for Technology Training, Development and Research), 2024. Explaining about implementing branding in marketing a product, we need to pay attention to the following 2 aspects:

3.1.1 Brand Guideline Overview

How to make affordable customers have a certain view of the brand we market

3.1.2 Brand Guideline Structure

How the stories, experiences, and solutions offered can relate to the needs and problems needed by customers.

This study aims to explore how branding design can be optimized through digital promotional media to support MSME businesses. Interviews with business owners were conducted in detail to understand the role of branding design in building brand awareness and customer engagement. The data obtained was

analyzed to identify best practices in utilizing digital platforms for SMEs, so that it can be a reference for other business actors.

4. Result

There are three stages in the data measurement model to explore in depth the role of design in building engagement and brand awareness of SMEs on digital platforms. The first stage includes a literature review that aims to collect relevant information and theories related to design, engagement, and brand awareness. Through this research, researchers can understand the broader context and find a framework that can be used in further research. It also helps in formulating more specific hypotheses and research questions. Second, conducting a qualitative approach method that allows researchers to find out more about customer experiences and perspectives through interviews and direct observation of customer interactions with brands on digital platforms. This includes analyzing content on social media, websites, or user experiences in online stores. These observations are very helpful in understanding how branding elements, such as visual design, narratives, and services, can affect user engagement. towards the perception of MSME brands. Third, using a purposive sampling method to select respondents who have relevant experiences with the brand being studied. For example, researchers can choose loyal customers from various market segments or MSME owners who have implemented certain branding strategies. This approach ensures that the data collected is more varied and relevant.

4.1 OHU Corndog Business Profile



Figure 1. OHU Corndog Social Media (Instagram)

A glimpse of Ohu corndog, it is a fast food snack made from sausage and mozzarella cheese wrapped in flour and breadcrumbs or instant noodles then fried and there are choices of toppings, namely sweet and salty. OHU Corndog was established in 2018 and has 3 outlet branches, and is always open every day from 17.00 WIB-finished. Like the sales hours which always start in the afternoon, the brand name OHU corndog, is taken from the Japanese word OHU which means afternoon, and corndog as a description of the product being sold, so OHU corndog means corndog sold in the afternoon. Initially OHU Corndog was only a home business, and promoted through online buying and selling forums (Facebook), after it was felt that quite a lot of people knew this product, then the owner opened an outlet in the city center and now routinely follows and uses social media WhatsApp and Instagram to communicate with customers. Currently, OHU corndog actively participates in events and bazaars held in Tanjungpinang City. Since the beginning of its marketing, OHU corndog has utilized branding design, such as the OHU Corndog logo, OHU which means afternoon, because the owner routinely starts his sales in the afternoon, the basic colors of Red, Yellow, Black, and White, which are consistently used in all his posts. In addition, OHU corndog also has a corndog mascot as a characteristic of its branding. After interviewing the owner of OHU corndog, the researcher asked about "What significant influence did the owner feel after optimizing the brand design that he did on the digital platform on the sales of his products so far". The owner of OHU Corndog (Putri Nur Atira), stated that her sales became known to the public after she routinely sold and promoted consistently at the beginning of selling in 2020, then in 2021-2022 OHU Corndog sales experienced a decline in sales, from a total turnover that initially reached IDR 800,000 now experiencing a fairly large decline ranging from IDR 500,000-IDR 600,000, the seller assumes that the decline in sales occurred due to the many events/bazaars that are mushrooming in Tanjungpinang. Therefore, the researcher wants to analyze in depth the optimization of brand design that has been carried out by the seller in its marketing and its influence on sales, such as using consistent colors, using mascots and using influencer services in its marketing, but the number of buyers has not increased significantly. The consumer purchasing decision process according to Kotler and Armstrong (2016: 179), namely including the purchasing process that begins with the recognition of needs, meaning that buyers are aware of their problems and needs. Furthermore, consumers who are interested may or may not look for more information. If the consumer's drive is strong and the product that satisfies it is near the consumer, the consumer may buy it. If not, the consumer will store the need in his memory and will continue to search for information related to the need. Another opinion is strengthened by Rachmawati & Sicillia Sawitri (2015), There are 3 important things to do in branding, the

first is the concept, behavior in managing (behavior), and visual (design & packaging). Good branding and can be categorized as successful branding, is a brand that can inhibit the emergence of new brands that represent competitors' products, can be a differentiator or characteristic and as a tool for companies to achieve economic value. Through this statement we can maximize the role of design in building brand identity in SMEs through digital platforms, by presenting information that is relevant to consumer needs, in order to provide encouragement and visual satisfaction so that consumers are more interested in buying OHU corndog products, and provide an overview of product identity and experience from the products offered.

4.1.1 OHU Corndog branding design

The following are existing visual elements that are already in use by OHU Corndog.



Figure 2. Logo

Figure 3. Marcot



Figure 4&5. Design feeds Sosial Media

- The branding name OHU Corndog, which means "afternoon" taken from Japanese, the name is quite short, easy to remember, and immediately identifies the product being sold.
- Logo, OHU Corndog uses the concept of wordmarks logo, which is a logo that only uses text according to a distinctive font.

- Typography, the typography used is less consistent, we can see from the choice of fonts that still change frequently, but the writing style is fun, relaxed, in accordance with the character of the brand, and the target audience who are mostly from the Gen Z group.
- Red, yellow, black, and white, the colors red, yellow, black, and white are a combination that is quite strong and attracts attention. Red is often associated with energy, enthusiasm, and appetite, while yellow gives a cheerful and warm impression. Black and white provide a strong contrast and a modern impression.
- Visual Elements
 - Illustration, the illustration used in the OHU Corndog design is a mascot, with various styles and expressions as a direct representation of the product offered, the illustrations used tend to be simple and easy to understand in order to give a fun and contemporary impression.
 - Pattern, the pattern that is consistently used is a simple wave pattern as a background. This pattern gives a dynamic and varied impression, so that the visual appearance is not monotonous.
 - Product Photos, the product photos used are original photos of the product, with good lighting the photos provide a more realistic and convincing appearance to consumers. Consumers can clearly see how the product actually looks.

Analysis of OHU Corndog's social media design shows great potential for development. Although it already has a strong foundation with attractive colors and a focus on the product, there is still room for improvement. The design needs to be more consistent, tell a stronger brand story, and increase interaction with the audience. Some development suggestions include strengthening the visual identity, better storytelling, increasing engagement, and targeting a more specific audience. By making these improvements, the OHU Corndog brand can build a stronger image and attract more consumers.

The recommendation to maximize the role of brand design that can be done is to maximize OHU Corndog branding with the Gen Z target audience, this can be done after considering competitor analysis, let's assume some of OHU Corndog's main competitors are corndog brands that are already popular or have similar concepts, in Tanjungpinang.

First, we need to identify Competitor Strengths such as finding out the advantages of Product Quality. Do competitors offer a variety of unique flavors or better dough quality?, Are competitor product prices more affordable or offer attractive promos?, Do competitors have many outlets or partnerships with food delivery applications?, How do competitors promote their products, whether through social media, influencers, or events?. That way we can innovate and make information content such as infographic posters, promo posters, and other information to inform customers about the advantages of the products we offer. Then Identify Competitor Weaknesses, maybe competitors are less focused on building a strong brand character. Or maybe competitors use concepts that are too general, competitor products may look too ordinary and less innovative, competitors may only focus on the local market and have not expanded to a wider area. that way we can maximize brand design, with a unique and consistent art style, in the form of a minimalist style that emphasizes simplicity with strong typography, contrasting color palettes, and clean food images, suitable for modern and elegant food products. Illustration style, unique and interesting to depict food in various creative ways, from cartoon to realistic or abstract, is suitable for food products that want to highlight creativity and fun. Photography style, with high-quality food photos to highlight the beauty and authenticity of food with dramatic or artistic modifications, is suitable to emphasize the quality and visual appeal of the product. By understanding the strengths and weaknesses of competitors, we can design a more effective design strategy to convey information about OHU Corndog to customers. Here are some brand design support strategies to consider:

- **Simple Yet Memorable Logo Design**

The logo should be easy to remember and recognizable from a distance. The logo can be a simple illustration of a corndog or use the shape of a corndog as part of the logo design. For example, a logo in the shape of a corndog with a smiling face and bright yellow color.

- **Use of Tagline**

A Short, Memorable, and Interesting Tagline, it is recommended to use language that is easy to understand and relevant to the Gen Z language style. For example, "original taste, maximum deliciousness" or "explosion of taste in every bite".

- **Use of Hook**

A hook is the initial part of a content that aims to attract the audience's attention instantly and make them want to continue reading or watching. An effective hook will make the audience curious and want to know more about your product or brand. Examples of hooks that can be used by OHU Corndog are as follows "Get ready to be addicted to the most unique corndog in town!", "Feel the sensation of an explosion of flavor in every bite of OHU Corndog!", or "Feel the crunchy sensation in every bite". It is recommended to use relaxed and fun language to attract the attention of the audience.

- **Use of Call To Action**

By using clear and inviting sentences or commands such as "Order now!", "Try it!", or "Tag your friends who like corndogs". This can encourage audience action and increase interaction with a content.

- **Hashtags**

Relevant and easy-to-remember hashtags can make content easier to find by users searching for related topics, and can also reach people who may not follow your account. In addition, the use of hashtags can help group content. For example, #OHUCorndog #CorndogKekinian #JajanSeru.

- **Choosing the Right Language Style**

The choice of language style can be adjusted to the target audience to be reached, if the target audience is Gen Z, OHU Corndog can use a relaxed and energetic language style, also use emoticons and abbreviations that are popular among Gen Z to make communication more relaxed.

- **Maximizing the Role of the Mascot**

The mascot that has been created by OHU Corndog is a medium of communication with customers, so when interacting, the admin can introduce himself as a mascot and can talk and interact with consumers. Use mascots in various media such as logos, packaging, videos, and other social media designs.

- **Find a Niche**

Look for a market niche that has not been touched by competitors. For example, focus on corndogs with organic ingredients or corndogs with a very

unique appearance. That way we can use infographic posters to convey information related to the advantages of OHU Corndog organic ingredients.

- **Storytelling**

Build a compelling story behind the ohu corndog brand, tell the story behind the brand: share the story of how ohu corndog started, what inspired the creation of the product, and the values it upholds. Create an emotional connection by connecting the brand story to the consumer experience. For example, tell how corndogs can be a loyal friend when hanging out with friends. OHU Corndog can tell the brand story through digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, or YouTube. For example, Create a short video that tells the story of a little boy who really loves corndogs and dreams of having his own corndog business.

- **Digital Marketing.**

Do digital marketing by creating interesting and relevant content for Gen Z, in addition to illustration design, Ohu Corndog can also create animated advertisements and videos, such as the process of making OHU Corndog, showing the filling and topping of melted Ohu Corndog, create challenges and trends with attractive bonuses. In addition, you can also collaborate with food or lifestyle influencers that suit the target audience.

- **Customer Experience**

In addition to the brand design that we have strengthened before, it is incomplete if we do not implement it into attractive and instagrammable packaging to encourage consumers to share product photos on social media. Good design also needs to be supported by good service to customers, train employees to provide friendly and professional service. Then give rewards to loyal customers to increase engagement.

- **Consistency**

Maintain consistency in visuals, messages, and tone of voice across all digital platforms used as marketing media. Continue to adapt to the latest trends and consumer behavior. Conduct regular evaluations to see the effectiveness of the strategies that have been implemented. By implementing the right and consistent strategy, OHU Corndog can become the most popular corndog brand among Gen Z.

5. Discussion

The results of this study indicate that OHU Corndog's branding has attractive elements, such as a memorable name, striking colors, and a distinctive mascot. However, inconsistencies in design, lack of storytelling, and suboptimal marketing strategies reduce the positive impact on sales. The decline in sales in 2021-2022, as explained by the owner, shows that although branding has been implemented, a more effective differentiation strategy is needed. The red and yellow colors and mascot have attracted attention, but inconsistent typography and visual design weaken the brand identity. Brand storytelling, such as the origin of the name "OHU," has great potential but needs to be maximized through interactive content on social media. Increasing competition requires innovation. OHU Corndog can stand out with unique flavor variants, focus on product quality, and strong branding. The use of hooks, call-to-action, and collaboration with influencers can also reach more consumers, especially Gen Z. Recommendations for development and important steps to strengthen brand design include: Consistency of visual and packaging design, interactive storytelling to create emotional connections, engagement through audience-based content and digital promotions. With this step, OHU Corndog can build a stronger image, increase sales, and compete more effectively in the market.

6. Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations

6.1. Conclusions

In conclusion, design plays a crucial role in maximizing MSME digital marketing. Consistent and attractive design on visual elements such as logos, colors, and illustrations can increase brand credibility, differentiate it from competitors, and increase brand awareness. A good design also needs to be implemented on digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook, to reach a wider audience. Through design, SMEs can build interesting storytelling to build emotional connections with customers, thereby increasing their loyalty. It is important for SMEs to always adapt to digital trends and evolving consumer preferences, and to conduct regular evaluations of the marketing strategies being implemented. Analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of competitors is also important for creating innovation.

6.2. Implications

Effective brand design provides a great opportunity for SMEs to strengthen their competitiveness in the competitive digital market. A consistent and attractive visual identity can increase brand credibility and differentiate it from competitors. Utilizing digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook can be a very profitable strategy for SMEs in reaching a wider audience. Social media not only makes it easier to interact directly with customers but also creates opportunities to build emotional connections through creative and interactive content. The quality of visual design and superior customer experience can be a determining factor in increasing brand awareness and customer loyalty. Delivering a strong message through visual elements such as logos, colors, and illustrations, when combined with quality service, has the potential to increase purchase rates and expand the customer base. The inability of SMEs to keep up with digital trends and changing consumer preferences can be a significant barrier to business growth. This is evident in the case of OHU Corndog, where the lack of innovation and adaptation to digital market dynamics resulted in a decline in sales performance. Thus, flexibility and innovation are key elements in maintaining brand relevance in the modern era. In conclusion, good brand design plays a key role in helping SMEs compete in the ever-changing digital market.

6.3. Recommendations

Building a strong brand identity requires consistency in design elements, such as the use of distinctive colors, typography, and illustrations. This aims to create an impression that is easily recognized and remembered by consumers. In addition to visual elements, storytelling can be a powerful tool for building emotional connections with customers. An interesting story behind a product or brand can make consumers feel more connected, which ultimately increases their loyalty.

Implementing a Digital Marketing Strategy by maximizing the use of social media such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook by presenting relevant, creative content that suits the preferences of the target audience, especially Gen Z. Interesting content not only increases customer engagement but also expands brand exposure. Collaboration with relevant influencers, especially in the food or lifestyle sector, can help reach a wider audience and build trust in the products offered. Increasing Customer Interaction and Experience with creative strategies, such as the use of brand mascots to convey friendly messages, interesting call-to-action

sentences, and unique and memorable promotional campaigns can provide a positive customer experience through friendly, responsive, and professional service. Customers who feel appreciated are more likely to return and recommend the product to others.

By conducting regular evaluations of the marketing strategies used to ensure their suitability with the latest trends and changing consumer needs. Quick and precise strategy adjustments will maintain brand relevance in a dynamic market. Competitor strength and weakness analysis is an important step in finding innovation opportunities. By studying what is successful and less successful from competitors, SMEs can develop more effective approaches and create products or services that are more attractive to consumers.

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