



# The Role of Brand Equity in Strengthening the Competitiveness of “Dinara Wooden Heel” Batik Sandal Products

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**Abstract.** This study aims to analyze the role of brand equity in enhancing the competitiveness of batik sandal products at “Dinara Wooden Heel.” The research adopts a qualitative approach using a case study method to gain an in-depth understanding of how the elements of brand equity namely brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association, and brand loyalty are developed and utilized by the business actors. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with the business owner and consumers, direct observation, and documentation. The data analysis technique was conducted descriptively through the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that brand equity plays a significant role in improving the competitiveness of Dinara Wooden Heel. The dimensions of perceived quality and brand association serve as the primary strengths in creating competitive advantage through consistent product quality and culture-based differentiation. Meanwhile, brand awareness declined due to distribution limitations during the pandemic, but has gradually recovered through the utilization of social media. On the other hand, brand loyalty has been established through repeat purchases, although its management remains relatively informal. Overall, the four dimensions of brand equity are integrated in enhancing competitiveness through brand visibility, product differentiation, consumer trust, and customer loyalty.

**Keywords:** Batik Sandals; Brand Awareness; Brand Equity; MSME Competitiveness; Perceived Quality

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The handicraft industry is one of the subsectors of the creative economy that holds significant potential in generating added value, particularly through the development of products based on culture and local wisdom. Handicraft products not only serve functional purposes but also embody aesthetic, symbolic, and cultural identity values that constitute their primary appeal to consumers (Howkins, 2002). The characteristics of handicraft products, which are relatively easy to imitate and often utilize similar raw materials, result in limited differentiation among products. This condition encourages business actors not only to rely on product advantages but also to build added value through non-functional aspects, one of which is brand strength. According to Shams et al. (2024) business actors need to integrate brand identity into adaptive digital strategies to ensure that the unique values of their products can be understood and trusted by consumers amid increasingly intense market competition.

Micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), as the dominant actors in the handicraft industry, face increasingly complex challenges. The growth in the number of MSMEs in Indonesia has been accompanied by a high level of competition, requiring business actors to develop strategies that can sustainably enhance their competitiveness. Competitiveness is no longer determined solely by price and product quality, but also by a firm's ability to build a positive perception in the minds of consumers (Kotler & Keller, 2016;

Porter, 2008). Therefore, strengthening brand-based marketing has become increasingly important for MSMEs, particularly within the craft-based creative industry. Recent studies indicate that brand equity plays a significant role in shaping consumer perceptions and influencing purchasing decisions, making it a crucial element in enhancing the competitiveness of MSMEs (Hazmi & Hanny, 2025).

Along with the evolution of modern marketing concepts, a brand is no longer understood merely as a symbol or visual identity, but as a representation of values, experiences, and consumer perceptions of a product. In this context, the concept of brand equity becomes relevant in explaining how a brand can create added value that differentiates a product in the market. According to Aaker (1991) brand equity consists of several key dimensions, namely brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association, and brand loyalty, which collectively shape consumer perceptions and influence purchasing decisions. Brand equity can therefore be regarded as one of the key factors in creating sustainable competitive advantage (Keller, 2013; Kotler & Keller, 2016).

The management of brand equity among MSMEs still faces various limitations. Most business actors tend to focus on production and short-term sales aspects, resulting in a lack of strategic brand development. In fact, strong brand equity has been proven to enhance consumer trust, foster loyalty, and strengthen a brand's position amid competition (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2005). This indicates a gap between the potential and the actual practice of brand management among MSMEs, particularly in the handicraft sector. One MSME operating within the handicraft industry in Malang City is Dinara Wooden Heel, which produces batik sandals by emphasizing aesthetic value and local wisdom. The products not only function as footwear but also represent cultural identity, which serves as their primary selling point. Nevertheless, Dinara Wooden Heel continues to face challenges in building strong brand equity amid increasingly diverse competing products, both in terms of price and design. This condition suggests that product excellence alone is insufficient; it must be supported by a brand equity strengthening strategy capable of creating positive perceptions in the minds of consumers (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007).



**Figure 1.** Dinara Wooden Heel MSME

This study is important to conduct in order to understand the role of brand equity in enhancing the competitiveness of batik sandal products at Dinara Wooden Heel. It aims to provide an in-depth analysis of how each dimension of brand equity is developed and utilized by the business actors. Furthermore, this study is expected to offer practical contributions for MSME practitioners in formulating brand strengthening strategies, as well as to enrich academic discourse on marketing and the competitiveness of MSMEs in Indonesia.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Concept of Brand Equity**

Brand equity is an important concept in marketing that explains the added value possessed by a product as a result of the presence of a brand attached to it (Keller, 2013). This added value is derived not only from the functional attributes of the product, but also from perceptions, experiences, and the emotional relationships formed between consumers and the brand (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Furthermore, according to Aquinia & Soliha (2020) brand equity can be understood as a strategic asset that enhances product value in the eyes of consumers while simultaneously providing a competitive advantage for a company. Aaker (1991) defines brand equity as a set of assets and liabilities linked to a brand's name and symbol that can add to or subtract from the value of a product. Consumer-based brand equity is formed through brand knowledge, which encompasses brand awareness and brand image stored in consumers' memory. These perspectives indicate that brand strength largely depends on how consumers recognize, understand, and perceive the brand (Keller, 2013; Kotler & Keller, 2016) as well as how brand experience and consumer engagement reinforce long-term relationships between consumers and the brand (Castillo-Villar & Murillo, 2025).

Brand equity is analyzed through four main dimensions proposed by David A. Aaker (1991), namely brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association, and brand loyalty, which have been widely applied in various marketing studies. These dimensions are interrelated in shaping the overall value of a brand. One of the fundamental dimensions is brand awareness, which refers to the ability of consumers to recognize and recall a brand in various purchasing situations. A high level of brand awareness enables a brand to be more easily included in consumers' consideration sets. According to Atilgan et al., (2005) brand awareness also serves as the foundation for the development of other brand equity dimensions, as associations and loyalty cannot develop optimally without prior awareness. Once consumers become aware of a brand, attention shifts to perceived quality, defined as consumers' perceptions of the overall quality or superiority of a product compared to alternative offerings (Zeithaml, 1998). This perception is inherently subjective and is influenced by consumer experiences, information, and expectations. A positive perception of quality can enhance trust, strengthen brand image, and ultimately drive purchasing decisions (Augusto & Torres, 2018).

Furthermore, the dimension of brand association plays a significant role in enriching the meaning of a brand in the minds of consumers, encompassing various elements linked to the brand, such as image, symbols, values, and experiences. Strong, positive, and unique associations are capable of creating clear differentiation in a competitive market and strengthening the brand's positioning. At a more advanced stage, all these dimensions ultimately lead to the formation of brand loyalty, which refers to the level of consumer attachment to a brand, as reflected in consistent repeat purchases (Oliver, 1999). Loyalty not only indicates satisfaction but also represents a long-term commitment of consumers to the brand. As a result, loyal consumers tend to be more resistant to competitors' influence and are more likely to recommend the brand to others.

In the context of MSMEs, the integration of brand equity dimensions plays a strategic role in enhancing business competitiveness in an increasingly competitive market. Competitiveness is not solely determined by price and product quality, but also by a brand's ability to create perceived value for consumers. MSMEs with strong brand equity tend to be more effective in attracting consumer attention, building trust, and maintaining long-term customer relationships (Mutmainah et al., 2024). Brand awareness and perceived quality have a significant influence on purchasing decisions, while brand loyalty contributes to business sustainability (Buil et al., 2013). Strong brand associations, such as cultural values or local identity, can serve as an important source of differentiation for MSMEs, particularly within the

craft-based creative industry. Therefore, strengthening brand equity represents a relevant strategy for MSMEs in addressing competitive pressures while simultaneously enhancing product value in the eyes of consumers

### **3. RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative method with a case study approach to obtain an in-depth understanding of the role of brand equity in enhancing the competitiveness of products at Dinara Wooden Heel. The qualitative approach is selected as it enables a comprehensive exploration of phenomena related to consumer perceptions, branding strategies, and the experiences of business actors in building brand value. The case study approach is applied because the research focuses on a specific object, namely Dinara Wooden Heel, which is considered representative of a craft-based MSME that develops products with a strong local identity. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with the business owner and relevant stakeholders who possess an understanding of the brand development process. The interviews were conducted directly at the business location.

In addition, data were also obtained through observation and documentation to support and validate the research findings. Data analysis was conducted using a descriptive qualitative approach, referring to the dimensions of brand equity proposed by David A. Aaker (1991), namely brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association, and brand loyalty. The collected data were then categorized based on these four dimensions to examine how each element of brand equity contributes to enhancing product value and strengthening the firm's position in the market.

### **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **Result**

Dinara Wooden Heel is a micro-enterprise engaged in the handicraft sector, specializing in wooden-based sandals with batik as the primary design element. This MSME is located in Tlogomas Subdistrict, Malang City. The business was established in 2017 as part of a community service initiative. The establishment was motivated by observations of the potential of wooden sandal businesses in the Singosari area, which at the time lacked strong brand identity and were not supported by structured design planning. During the early stages of its development, Dinara Wooden Heel focused on improving fundamental business aspects, particularly in terms of branding and product design. The business owner introduced innovations by developing a brand identity through the use of a logo that was subsequently

officially registered, as well as restructuring the production process by utilizing appropriate technology. In addition, product development was carried out by incorporating batik fabric as the main material for the upper part of the sandals, which had not been widely adopted by similar businesses.

Along with the development of the business, Dinara Wooden Heel has continuously introduced innovations to create product differentiation. One of the key innovations involves the development of batik motifs, which are not only applied through fabric but also directly painted onto the body of the sandals using specific painting techniques. This innovation has become a distinctive feature that strengthens the product’s identity in the market. The name “Dinara” itself emerged as part of the branding process aimed at providing added value and reinforcing the business’s market position. From a market perspective, Dinara Wooden Heel initially targeted consumers in the Java region, particularly those with cultural associations to the use of *klompen* sandals. This strategy is rooted in the historical and cultural significance of *klompen*, which are commonly associated with royal environments and Javanese society. Therefore, the targeted market segmentation is not merely functional in nature, but also incorporates cultural aspects as a source of added value for the product.



**Figure 2.** Dinara Products

Overall, the development of Dinara Wooden Heel reflects consistent efforts to build a craft-based business through innovation and the strengthening of brand identity. This profile is important as a foundation for understanding how brand equity is developed and leveraged to enhance the competitiveness of batik sandal products. Based on the business profile described above, it can be understood that Dinara Wooden Heel not only focuses on production aspects but also strives to establish a strong brand identity through various product innovations and marketing strategies. These efforts indicate an ongoing process of brand value creation that evolves alongside the growth of the business. To gain a deeper understanding of how this brand strength is formed, this study further analyzes the brand equity of Dinara Wooden Heel through

four key dimensions, namely brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association, and brand loyalty. These dimensions are used to illustrate how the Dinara Wooden Heel brand is recognized, perceived, remembered, and sustained by consumers within a competitive market context.

### ***Brand Awareness***

The findings indicate that the level of brand awareness of Dinara Wooden Heel has experienced notable dynamics from its establishment to the present. In the early period, particularly from 2017 until before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Dinara Wooden Heel brand was relatively well recognized within specific market segments. Its batik wooden sandal products even dominated distribution across various tourist destinations, including Solo, Pekalongan, Klaten, and Bali. The distribution network, which expanded to dozens of marketing points, suggests that during this period, brand awareness was at a relatively strong level, especially in culture-based tourism areas. The marketing strategy implemented at that time primarily emphasized a direct approach through partnerships with local sellers in tourist locations. The business owner actively developed distribution networks by visiting various tourist destinations and establishing collaborations with local business actors. This approach proved effective in increasing product visibility directly to consumers.

However, this condition changed significantly following the COVID-19 pandemic. The closure of tourist destinations led to the cessation of distribution activities across many marketing points, thereby reducing the brand's level of exposure. In response to these challenges, the business began to adapt by utilizing social media platforms, such as Facebook and TikTok, as promotional tools, supported by marketing training programs provided by the government. Currently, the strategy has shifted toward engaging younger generations, particularly university students, to assist in promoting products through their social media accounts. Although these efforts reflect adaptation to changes in the marketing environment, the management of brand awareness remains gradual and has not yet been fully structured in a systematic manner.

### ***Perceived Quality***

Dinara Wooden Heel demonstrates a strong commitment to maintaining product quality as one of the core aspects of its business. The production process has undergone adjustments, particularly since the pandemic, with the implementation of a home-based working system. Each worker is responsible for specific stages of production, ranging from material cutting and shaping to the finishing process, thereby creating a distributed yet coordinated workflow. In addition, there has been a regeneration of the workforce from older

to younger generations. This transition has had a positive impact on product development, particularly in terms of creativity and design innovation. Despite changes in the production system, quality standards have been consistently maintained, both in terms of raw materials and production processes.

From a product perspective, there has been a significant improvement in quality. This is reflected in the use of higher-grade materials, such as the enhancement of sole quality and the diversification of upper materials, which now include not only fabric but also semi-leather and leather. These efforts indicate continuous improvement in maintaining and enhancing product quality. Consumer responses to product quality have also been positive. Customers perceive Dinara Wooden Heel products as comfortable to use and durable. Some consumers continue to use the products over an extended period, indicating that the perceived quality of these products is relatively high.

### ***Brand Association***

The brand association of Dinara Wooden Heel is formed through the strengthening of product identity based on cultural values, particularly through the use of batik as the primary element. The sandals produced not only function as footwear but also represent aesthetic value and local cultural identity. The use of batik, both in the form of fabric and motifs directly applied to the product, serves as a distinctive feature that differentiates it from similar products in the market. In addition, the business actively seeks to build a positive brand image through participation in various events and recognition programs, such as involvement in the Apresiasi Kreasi Indonesia program, as well as achieving finalist and nominee positions in local small business competitions. Participation in such activities reflects efforts to strengthen the image of the business as a serious and quality-oriented enterprise. From the consumer perspective, the association with the Dinara Wooden Heel brand can be considered relatively strong. Consumers tend to directly associate batik sandal products with the “Dinara” brand. In some cases, consumers even specifically search for products by mentioning the brand name. This indicates that the brand has established a distinct position in consumers’ memory, particularly within the category of culture-based batik sandals.

### ***Brand Loyalty***

The brand associations of Dinara Wooden Heel are developed through the reinforcement of a product identity grounded in cultural values, particularly through the use of batik as the primary element. The sandals produced not only serve as functional footwear but also embody aesthetic value and local cultural identity. The use of batik, both as fabric and as

motifs directly applied to the product, constitutes a distinctive feature that differentiates it from similar products in the market.

Furthermore, the business actively strives to establish a positive brand image through participation in various events and recognition programs, including involvement in the *Apresiasi Kreasi Indonesia* program, as well as attaining finalist and nominee positions in local small business competitions. Such participation reflects continuous efforts to reinforce the image of the business as a committed and quality-oriented enterprise. From a consumer perspective, the associations with the Dinara Wooden Heel brand can be considered relatively strong. Consumers tend to directly associate batik sandal products with the “Dinara” brand, and in some cases, they explicitly search for products by mentioning the brand name. This suggests that the brand has established a distinct position in consumers’ memory, particularly within the category of culture-based batik sandals.

## **Discussion**

The findings indicate that brand equity plays a significant role in shaping the competitiveness of Dinara Wooden Heel’s batik sandal products. The four dimensions of brand equity do not operate independently; rather, they are interrelated and collectively contribute to the overall strength of the brand. This finding is consistent with the concept proposed by David A. Aaker (1991), which posits that brand equity comprises a set of interrelated assets that contribute to the overall value of a brand.

### ***Brand Awareness in Enhancing Market Visibility***

The findings indicate that Dinara Wooden Heel previously achieved a high level of brand awareness, particularly in the period prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, as evidenced by its extensive distribution network across various tourist destinations. This suggests that the direct marketing strategy implemented was effective in increasing brand exposure. From a theoretical perspective, brand awareness represents a crucial initial stage in building brand equity, as it determines whether a brand is included in consumers’ consideration sets during the purchasing process (Keller, 2013).

The high visibility of Dinara Wooden Heel during this period indicates that the brand successfully occupied a position in consumers’ memory, particularly within the culture-based tourism market segment. However, the decline in distribution activities due to the pandemic led to a decrease in brand awareness. This finding suggests that the existing level of brand awareness was still dependent on specific distribution channels and was not yet fully supported by a sustainable marketing communication strategy. According to Ashley & Tuten (2015) the sustainability of brand awareness is strongly influenced by the consistency of brand

communication across multiple channels, including digital media. It can therefore be concluded that the current adaptation to social media represents an important step. However, further strengthening is required to ensure a more structured approach, as enhancing brand awareness remains essential in supporting competitiveness through increased market visibility.

### ***Perceived Quality as a Source of Competitive Advantage***

Perceived quality constitutes one of the primary strengths of Dinara Wooden Heel. The commitment to maintaining the quality of raw materials, production processes, and product innovation has a positive impact on consumer perceptions. Consumer responses indicating that the products are comfortable to wear and durable further reinforce the finding that the perceived quality is at a high level. In marketing theory, perceived quality does not merely reflect objective quality, but rather how consumers evaluate the superiority of a product compared to alternative offerings (Zeithaml, 1998). A high level of perceived quality can enhance consumer trust and strengthen a brand’s position in the market. This is evident in Dinara Wooden Heel, where product quality serves as a primary driver of repeat purchases. Moreover, the innovations undertaken, such as the use of higher-quality materials and the development of product design, indicate ongoing efforts toward continuous improvement. According to Buil et al., (2013) consistent quality enhancement is one of the key factors in strengthening brand equity and generating positive consumer responses. Thus, in this context, perceived quality not only represents a product advantage but also serves as a foundation for building competitiveness. This is supported by studies indicating that perceived quality has a significant influence on brand trust, which subsequently affects consumer purchasing behavior (Konuk, 2021). It can therefore be emphasized that perceived quality is not merely a product strength, but also a critical source of competitive advantage that enhances overall competitiveness.

### ***Brand Association as Culture Based Differentiation***

The brand associations developed by Dinara Wooden Heel are centered on cultural values, particularly through the use of batik as the primary product element. This creates a distinctive brand identity that differentiates it from similar products, which are generally more function-oriented. The strengthening of cultural elements serves as a form of differentiation that is not only visual in nature but also carries symbolic meaning. According to Kevin Lane Keller (2013), strong, favorable, and unique brand associations are essential in establishing a solid brand image in consumers’ minds. Culture-based associations have the potential to create emotional bonding between consumers and the product, thereby enhancing perceived value. The finding that consumers directly associate batik sandals with the “Dinara” brand indicates that brand associations have been formed at a relatively strong level. This is further supported

by participation in various recognition events, which contribute to building a positive business image. It can therefore be inferred that, in this study, brand association functions as a differentiation tool that enhances competitiveness, particularly in markets characterized by a high presence of similar products. Thus, brand association plays a critical role as a source of differentiation that strengthens the product's competitiveness in the market.

### ***Brand Loyalty as a Driver of Business Sustainability***

Brand loyalty at Dinara Wooden Heel is reflected in the presence of repeat customers who make purchases over an extended period. This finding supports Oliver, (1999) theory that loyalty is not merely a purchasing behavior, but a deeply held commitment that is resilient to competitive pressures. The fact that consumers return even after several years indicates that Dinara has moved beyond purchase loyalty toward attitudinal loyalty, where trust in consistent innovation serves as the primary binding factor. From a theoretical perspective, this phenomenon can be explained through Keller (2013). concept of Brand Resonance. The customer loyalty observed in Dinara Wooden Heel represents the highest level within the brand equity pyramid, where a strong and meaningful relationship between consumers and the product is established. However, when viewed through a more recent theoretical lens, namely Customer Engagement Pansari & Kumar (2017) the strong loyalty observed in Dinara Wooden Heel can still be considered relatively passive, as its retention strategies remain largely informal. Although consumer trust has been established, the business has not yet optimally converted this loyalty into measurable engagement value.

This condition indicates that Dinara Wooden Heel has successfully built strong relationships with its consumers, where repeat purchases reflect genuine commitment rather than habitual behavior. Furthermore, recent studies highlight that loyalty is also influenced by customer engagement and sustained brand experiences (Rather & Hollebeek, 2021). The relatively informal management of customer loyalty suggests that the potential for long-term relationships has not been fully optimized. Therefore, more structured retention strategies are required, such as leveraging digital channels to strengthen consumer engagement, which in turn can support the long-term sustainability of business competitiveness.

### ***The Role of Brand Equity in Enhancing Competitiveness***

Overall, the findings indicate that brand equity makes a substantial contribution to enhancing the competitiveness of Dinara Wooden Heel. Perceived quality and brand association emerge as the most dominant dimensions in shaping brand strength, while brand awareness and brand loyalty still require further strengthening. From a competitiveness perspective (Porter, 2008) argues that competitive advantage can be achieved through

differentiation and the creation of perceived value for consumers. Dinara Wooden Heel has successfully established differentiation through product quality and cultural associations. However, to further strengthen its market position, greater emphasis is needed on improving brand visibility and managing customer relationships more effectively. In this regard, brand equity functions not only as a marketing tool but also as a strategic instrument for achieving sustainable competitive advantage. Therefore, the integrated management of the four dimensions of brand equity becomes a key factor in enhancing the competitiveness of MSMEs, particularly within the culture-based creative industry.

## **5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

This study demonstrates that brand equity plays a significant role in enhancing the competitiveness of Dinara Wooden Heel as an MSME, where its four dimensions brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association, and brand loyalty are interconnected in shaping overall brand strength. Perceived quality and brand association emerge as the primary strengths, creating added value through consistent product quality and a distinctive batik-based cultural identity, thereby strengthening the brand's position in consumers' minds. Meanwhile, brand awareness and brand loyalty show promising potential but still require further enhancement, particularly due to marketing strategies that remain dependent on specific channels and the relatively unstructured management of customer loyalty. The findings of this study confirm that brand equity functions not only as a marketing tool but also as a strategic approach for achieving sustainable competitive advantage for MSMEs, particularly within the culture-based creative industry.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that Dinara Wooden Heel strengthen the management of its brand equity in a more systematic and integrated manner. Enhancing brand awareness can be achieved through the consistent optimization of digital marketing, including the development of culture-based storytelling content and the more strategic use of social media platforms. In addition, the existing customer loyalty should be managed through more structured retention programs, such as maintaining customer databases, offering repeat purchase incentives, and increasing interaction through digital channels to foster greater customer engagement. The strength in brand association should also be continuously maintained and further developed by reinforcing cultural identity narratives in both product design and brand communication. Thus, the integration of all brand equity dimensions within a sustainable marketing strategy becomes a key factor in enhancing business competitiveness, as brand equity serves as a primary mechanism for improving competitiveness through

visibility, differentiation, trust, and customer loyalty. For future research, it is recommended to adopt a quantitative approach in order to measure the influence of each brand equity dimension more comprehensively, as well as to expand the scope of research to other MSME sectors.

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