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Analysis of Branding Strategies for Enhancing MSME Development at UD. Sona

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the implementation of the branding strategy carried out by UD. Sona, identify the supporting factors and obstacles in implementing the branding strategy, and describe the impact of the branding strategy on UD. Sona's products and its further development. This study employed a qualitative method with UD. Sona as the research location and involved six informants consisting of a key informant, main informants, and supporting informants. Data were collected through interviews, observation, and documentation, and were analyzed descriptively to obtain an overview of the implementation of the branding strategy. The results showed that UD. Sona implemented its branding strategy through direct marketing, the use of social media, packaging development, cooperation with minimarkets, and strengthening product identity as a traditional Nias snack, particularly kamumu chips. These strategies helped increase product recognition, build consumer trust, and strengthen UD. Sona's image as a producer of traditional Nias snacks. However, the implementation still faces several obstacles, including the seasonal availability of kamumu raw materials, limited product distribution, suboptimal digital promotion, and a less strategic business location that is difficult for consumers to find. The branding strategy also helped expand product recognition through social media, cooperation with minimarkets, bazaars, and MSME exhibitions. Further development should focus on strengthening digital promotion, expanding distribution networks, improving packaging quality, and increasing the accessibility of information about the business location.

1. Introduction

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play a strategic role in economic development at both national and regional levels. They contribute to employment creation, stimulate local economic activities, and facilitate the utilization of locally available resources. Furthermore, MSMEs support regional economic development by transforming local products into value-added goods that can improve community income. Amid globalization and digital transformation, business competition has become increasingly intense, requiring MSMEs to develop not only high-quality products but also effective marketing strategies to enhance product visibility, attract consumer interest, and strengthen market competitiveness. In this context, branding has become an important element of business development. Branding involves establishing a distinctive product identity, developing a favorable brand image, and communicating value propositions that enable consumers to recognize, remember, and trust a product.

Despite the importance of branding, many MSMEs have not fully optimized branding strategies to support their business development. Business owners often prioritize production and sales activities, while brand identity development, packaging design, and promotional strategies receive insufficient attention. This situation creates a gap between the actual potential of MSME products and their recognition in the marketplace. Although many local products possess distinctive characteristics and satisfactory quality, their market visibility remains limited because of inadequate branding and marketing practices. These challenges are particularly relevant to businesses producing traditional regional food products, which have

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considerable potential to serve as local specialties and souvenirs. However, without appropriate branding strategies, such products may struggle to compete with modern products that benefit from stronger brand identities, more attractive packaging, and better-planned promotional activities.

One MSME operating in the regional food-processing sector is UD. Sona, located in Gunungsitoli City, Indonesia. The business produces traditional Nias chips made from kimpul, locally known as keripik kamumu, with balado as one of its featured flavors. Its competitive advantages include the utilization of locally sourced ingredients from Nias, an authentic taste that reflects the region's cultural identity, and its potential to serve as a distinctive Nias souvenir. UD. Sona has also established a sales account on Shopee, indicating an initial effort to participate in digital commerce. Nevertheless, the existence of an online sales channel does not necessarily guarantee effective market penetration when its utilization remains limited.

Based on field observations, several challenges have been identified in the implementation of branding strategies at UD. Sona. First, the development of a distinctive brand identity and a consistent product image has not been fully optimized. The business continues to emphasize production and sales activities, while brand development, packaging design, and marketing communication have not received sufficient attention. Second, the use of digital promotional channels remains limited. Although UD. Sona utilizes social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, its promotional activities primarily consist of uploading content without being supported by a more structured digital marketing strategy, such as paid advertising through the Cost Per Click (CPC) model. Consequently, promotional reach may remain limited, reducing opportunities to introduce the product to a broader audience. Similarly, although the business has a Shopee account, the platform is rarely used actively, limiting its potential contribution to online sales and market expansion.

A further challenge concerns the physical accessibility and visibility of the business location. UD. Sona is situated inside a narrow alley and cannot be easily seen from the main road. This condition makes the business difficult to locate, particularly for prospective customers who have never visited the premises. During the preliminary observation, the researcher also experienced difficulties locating the business because its position was not sufficiently visible and the information available on Google Maps was not entirely accurate. These circumstances may constrain direct promotional activities and reduce opportunities for new customers to discover the product. Accordingly, branding efforts at UD. Sona need to be examined not only in terms of brand identity and digital promotion but also in relation to the accessibility and visibility of the business as factors that may influence consumer awareness.

Previous studies provide evidence of the importance of branding for MSME development. Fatmala and Anwar (2024), in their study entitled "Strategi Branding pada UMKM Salad Buah Bintang Desa Mlorah Kecamatan Rejoso Kabupaten Nganjuk," found that branding strategies involving logo development and product packaging labels can help differentiate products from similar offerings. Branding also contributes to business image development, strengthens consumer trust, and serves as an effective promotional instrument that can support increased sales and business income. Similarly, Hasanah et al. (2021), in their study entitled "Strategi Membangun Branding Bagi Pelaku Usaha Mikro Kecil Menengah," demonstrated that developing a strong brand can help transform small businesses into more recognizable and successful market participants. Their findings also indicated that increased consumer trust in a brand can have a substantial impact on sales performance. These studies underscore the importance of branding as an element of MSME development and market competitiveness.

Nevertheless, the existing studies leave opportunities for further investigation. The two studies primarily address branding in a general MSME context and do not specifically examine the implementation of branding strategies for regional specialty products under conditions involving limited physical visibility and suboptimal digital marketing utilization. Furthermore, the integration of brand identity development, social media promotion, and e-commerce utilization remains insufficiently explored in the specific context of a local food-processing business whose promotional

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activities rely mainly on organic content posting, without paid advertising, and whose online sales platform is not used consistently. These limitations provide a basis for examining how branding strategies are implemented in a particular business context and how operational constraints may influence their optimization.

Accordingly, the research problem concerns the extent to which UD. Sona has implemented branding strategies to strengthen its product identity, improve promotional reach, and increase its visibility among prospective consumers, as well as the challenges that hinder the optimization of these strategies. This study aims to analyze the branding strategies implemented by UD. Sona in developing its MSME business, identify the obstacles encountered in brand development and digital marketing, and examine potential improvements in brand identity, promotional activities, e-commerce utilization, and business visibility. The study is expected to contribute theoretically by enriching the discussion of branding strategy implementation in MSMEs, particularly those producing locally distinctive food products. Practically, the findings may provide recommendations for UD. Sona and other MSME practitioners seeking to strengthen brand recognition, improve digital marketing practices, and expand market reach despite limitations in business location and promotional resources.

The novelty of this study lies in its contextual examination of branding strategy implementation through the combined consideration of product identity, social media promotion, e-commerce utilization, and physical business visibility within a local Nias food-processing MSME. By examining these interconnected aspects, the study seeks to provide a more context-sensitive understanding of branding challenges and improvement opportunities in small businesses. Therefore, this study is entitled "Analysis of Branding Strategies for Enhancing MSME Development at UD. Sona."

2. Literature Review

2.1. Conceptual and Theoretical Foundations

2.1.1. Business Strategy

Business strategy refers to a long-term, coordinated approach through which an organization determines its objectives, allocates resources, and responds to its competitive environment. Kotler and Keller (2021) emphasize the importance of understanding customer needs and market trends to establish a favorable market position. Similarly, Handayani and Sarwono (2021) describe business strategy as a planned and coordinated effort to achieve long-term business objectives. Siagian (as cited in Pahlevi & Musa, 2023) also conceptualizes strategy as a long-term plan that enables an organization to interact effectively with its environment and achieve its objectives under competitive conditions.

For MSMEs, business strategy provides direction for business development, market expansion, and adaptation to internal and external challenges. Rajagukguk et al. (2023), citing Noviana and Purwati, highlight the role of strategy in increasing business profitability and supporting sustainable growth. Kurniawan (2018) further emphasizes its contribution to competitiveness, revenue improvement, market expansion, and business planning. In addition, Khoiriyah and Pratama (2025) explain that MSME development strategies should consider internal capabilities, external conditions, technological developments, digital infrastructure, and market access. These perspectives establish the basis for examining branding as a strategic approach to developing UD. Sona.

2.1.2. Branding and Branding Strategy

Branding is a process of establishing and strengthening a product's identity so that consumers can recognize and distinguish it from competing products. Wardhana (2021) explains that a brand comprises identifying elements, such as a name, symbol, design, or other distinctive features, that differentiate a product or service. Kotler and Keller (2015) similarly define a brand through the combination of names, terms, signs, symbols, and designs used to identify and distinguish a seller's offerings. Haque-Fawzi et al. (2022) emphasize that branding involves introducing and strengthening a product's identity in the marketplace.

Branding strategy extends beyond visual presentation to encompass the deliberate development of brand identity, image, positioning, and consumer perceptions. Pramadhika et al. (2025) describe branding strategy as an integral component of modern marketing that shapes product identity and favorable consumer perceptions. Parawansa

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(2024) highlights its role in differentiating businesses from competitors and developing consumer loyalty, while Nardo et al. (2024) emphasize consistent consumer experiences and effective communication of brand values.

Nardo et al. (2024) identify several important branding components, including brand identity, brand image, brand messaging, brand values, customer experience, consistency, differentiation, brand management, innovation, and brand communication. For the present study, these elements are relevant to understanding how UD. Sona establishes its product identity, communicates the distinctive characteristics of Nias specialty chips, and promotes its products through packaging and digital channels.

Branding strategy also aims to improve brand recognition, strengthen market positioning, build consumer trust, and support marketing activities (Sundari & Hafani, 2024). Haque-Fawzi et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of clear brand objectives, consistency, customer relationships, appropriate communication channels, and competitor analysis. Nevertheless, implementation may be constrained by difficulties in identifying target markets, measuring branding returns, maintaining consistent messages, and establishing product differentiation (Parawansa, 2024).

Saje et al. (2024) identify three principal indicators of branding strategy: brand positioning, brand personality, and brand identity. These indicators provide a focused conceptual basis for examining how UD. Sona differentiates its products, communicates its distinctive characteristics, and establishes a recognizable market identity. They are used as analytical concepts rather than as variables in a causal model.

2.1.3. Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are important contributors to economic development, employment creation, and community welfare. Anwar et al. (2023) emphasize their significance in supporting public welfare, particularly in developing countries. Sanjaya and Nuratama (2021) describe MSMEs as small-scale businesses managed by individuals or small groups with relatively limited assets and income.

Despite their economic importance, MSMEs face constraints involving resources, institutional support, infrastructure, and market access. Simangunsong (2022), citing Thoha, identifies limited access to strategic business locations among the challenges affecting MSME development. This issue is particularly relevant to UD. Sona because its location inside an alley may restrict physical visibility and opportunities for potential customers to discover its products. Consequently, branding development needs to be considered alongside the operational and environmental conditions that influence market reach.

2.2. Review of Empirical Studies

Fatmala and Anwar (2024), in their study of branding strategies at UMKM Salad Buah Bintang in Mlorah Village, Nganjuk Regency, demonstrate that logo development and packaging labels can differentiate products, strengthen business image, increase consumer trust, and support sales and business income. Their findings highlight the importance of visual brand identity and product presentation in MSME development.

Similarly, Hasanah et al. (2021), in their study of branding strategies for MSMEs, explain that building a strong brand can improve business recognition and market success. Their findings also indicate that consumer trust in a brand can contribute to increased sales. Together, these studies demonstrate that branding serves both a differentiation function and a means of strengthening relationships with consumers.

Although these studies provide a basis for understanding branding in MSMEs, the available descriptions primarily emphasize general branding practices and brand identity development. The present study extends this discussion by examining the specific circumstances of UD. Sona, a producer of traditional Nias chips, where branding challenges involve not only product identity and packaging but also social media promotion, limited use of e-commerce, and physical business visibility. The analysis therefore considers branding as a practical business process shaped by the interaction between promotional activities and the conditions in which the enterprise operates.

2.3. Identification of the Research Gap

The reviewed literature establishes the importance of branding in product differentiation, consumer recognition, trust, and business

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development. However, a contextual gap remains concerning the implementation of branding strategies by local food-producing MSMEs whose products possess distinctive regional characteristics but whose marketing resources and physical visibility may be limited.

The studies by Fatmala and Anwar (2024) and Hasanah et al. (2021) provide relevant insights into branding development and its potential benefits. Nevertheless, the available descriptions do not establish how branding implementation, supporting and inhibiting factors, and subsequent development opportunities interact within the particular context of UD. Sona. The limited use of digital promotional tools and e-commerce, together with the challenges associated with the business location, provides a specific context for further investigation.

Accordingly, this study addresses the contextual gap by examining branding strategy implementation at UD. Sona, identifying the factors that support or hinder its implementation, and exploring its perceived impacts and potential development. The study does not assume that branding automatically causes an increase in sales or competitiveness; rather, it investigates these aspects within the actual operational context of the business.

2.4. Development of the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is based on the understanding that branding strategy encompasses more than the visual identity of a product. It includes the implementation of branding in business activities, the conditions influencing its implementation, and the resulting benefits and opportunities for further development. Suyono and Hariyanto (2021) explain that a concept map organizes concepts logically and systematically. Consistent with this perspective, the framework adopted in this study is non-causal and is intended to map the main analytical dimensions rather than establish cause-and-effect relationships.

UD. Sona serves as the research object because it produces traditional Nias chips made from kimpul. The analysis of its branding strategy is organized into three interconnected dimensions.

First, branding strategy implementation examines how UD. Sona manages product identity, packaging, product quality, promotion, and distribution. Brand positioning, brand personality, and brand identity, as discussed by Saje et al. (2024), provide supporting concepts for understanding the development and communication of the product's distinctive characteristics.

Second, supporting and inhibiting factors examine the internal and external conditions influencing branding implementation. Supporting factors include product quality, the uniqueness of Nias specialty products, packaging, cooperation with other parties, and promotional media. Inhibiting factors include limited capital, raw materials, business location, distribution facilities, and promotional capabilities.

Third, branding impacts and development examines the benefits perceived or observed in relation to product attractiveness, product recognition, consumer trust, sales, and competitiveness. It also considers potential improvements, including packaging development,

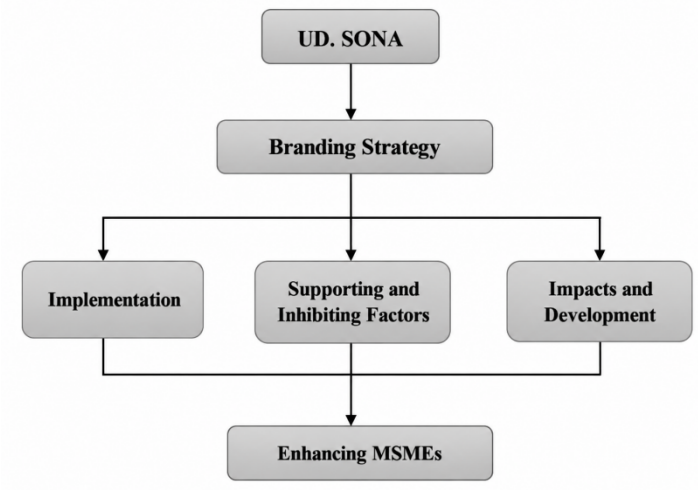


Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

Source: Processed by the Researcher, 2026

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stronger digital promotion, expanded distribution, and reinforcement of UD. Sona's identity as a producer of traditional Nias products.

The three dimensions provide an integrated analytical basis for understanding branding implementation and identifying opportunities for business development. The framework is presented in Figure 1.

2.5. Hypotheses or Research Propositions

This study does not formulate statistical hypotheses because its conceptual framework is non-causal and its purpose is to analyze branding strategy implementation in a specific business context. Instead, the study is guided by three research questions:

a. How is the branding strategy implemented at UD. Sona?
b. What factors support and hinder the implementation of branding strategies at UD. Sona?
c. What impacts and development opportunities are associated with the branding strategy implemented at UD. Sona?

These questions correspond directly to the three dimensions of the conceptual framework: implementation, supporting and inhibiting factors, and impacts and development. They guide the analysis without presupposing causal relationships among the concepts.

3. Research Methods

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach to obtain an in-depth understanding of branding strategy implementation at UD. Sona. The approach was selected to explore actual business practices and describe the phenomenon within its natural context. Bogdan and Taylor (as cited in Abdussamad, 2021) explain that qualitative research produces descriptive data concerning observed behaviors, while Moleong (as cited in Fiantika et al., 2022) emphasizes understanding phenomena holistically within their natural settings. Accordingly, this study used an inductive approach to examine branding practices based on field findings rather than predetermined hypotheses.

3.2. Research Context and Setting

The research was conducted at UD. Sona, an MSME engaged in producing and selling traditional Nias chips, including kimpul (kamumu) chips and banana chips. The business is located at Jl. Pelud Binaka Km. 12.5, toward Helefanikha, Hamlet II, Bawodesolo Village, Idanoi District, Gunungsitoli City, North Sumatra, Indonesia. This setting was selected because UD. Sona provides a relevant context for examining branding implementation, promotional activities, product identity, and the challenges faced by a local food-processing MSME.

3.3. Population and Sample / Research Participants

The study involved six informants selected through purposive sampling based on their relevance to the research objectives. Kusumastuti and Khoiron (2019) explain that qualitative research informants are individuals capable of understanding and providing reflective information about the phenomenon under investigation. The participants comprised a key informant, main informants, and supporting informants, representing the business owner, production, packaging, distribution, and consumers. The business owner served as the key informant because of their comprehensive knowledge of branding practices, while the other participants provided perspectives on product quality, packaging, distribution, and consumer perceptions.

3.4. Data Sources and Data Collection

The study used descriptive data obtained through three data collection techniques:

a. Observation. Direct observation was conducted to examine the research object and actual business practices. Arikunto (as cited in Untari, 2018) defines observation as focusing attention on an object using the senses.
b. Interviews. Interviews were conducted with selected informants to obtain information about branding strategy implementation. Sahir (2021) explains that structured interviews involve asking the same questions to each participant.
c. Documentation. Relevant records, photographs, archives, and other supporting documents were collected. Zuriah (as cited in Fiantika et al., 2022) describes documentation as a data collection technique involving the collection of documents relevant to the research.

These techniques were used to obtain

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complementary information about branding practices and the conditions influencing their implementation at UD. Sona.

3.5. Measurement of Variables and Research Instruments

As a qualitative study, this research did not employ statistical variables, measurement scales, or standardized quantitative instruments. Instead, the analysis focused on three conceptual dimensions of branding strategy: implementation, supporting and inhibiting factors, and impacts and development opportunities. Interviews, direct observation, and documentation served as the principal data collection instruments. These dimensions guided the examination of product identity, packaging, promotion, distribution, operational constraints, consumer perceptions, and potential branding improvements.

3.6. Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed descriptively and inductively to interpret the information obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation. Creswell (as cited in Kusumastuti & Khoiron, 2019) explains that qualitative data analysis involves making comprehensive sense of textual or visual information. The analysis followed the three stages identified by Miles and Huberman (as cited in Fiantika et al., 2022):

a. Data reduction: Selecting, simplifying, and focusing the raw data relevant to the research objectives.
b. Data display: Organizing the reduced data into structured narratives, tables, or diagrams to facilitate interpretation.
c. Conclusion drawing: Interpreting the analyzed data to identify meaningful findings concerning branding strategy implementation at UD. Sona.

3.7. Validity, Reliability, and Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the findings was addressed through four criteria identified by Kumara (2018):

a. Credibility: Establishing confidence that the findings accurately reflect the information obtained from the field.
b. Transferability: Providing contextual information that enables readers to assess the relevance of the findings to other settings.
c. Dependability: Maintaining a systematic and documented research process to support consistency.
d. Confirmability: Ensuring that interpretations are grounded in the collected data and can be justified by the research evidence.

These criteria were used as the methodological basis for assessing the trustworthiness of the qualitative findings.

3.8. Ethical Considerations

Research ethics guided the conduct of data collection and interactions with informants. Abdussamad (2021) explains that ethics concerns moral judgments about appropriate and inappropriate human actions. Accordingly, this study emphasized responsible data collection, respect for informants, and the responsible handling of information obtained during interviews, observations, and documentation.

3.9. Research Procedure

The research procedure consisted of several interconnected stages: identifying the research focus, determining the research location and informants, collecting data through interviews, observation, and documentation, analyzing the data through reduction and display, and drawing conclusions. The research process was directed toward examining the implementation of branding strategies, identifying supporting and inhibiting factors, and describing their impacts and potential development at UD. Sona.

3.10. Methodological Limitations

This study focused on a single MSME, UD. Sona, and involved six purposively selected informants. Consequently, the findings provide a contextual understanding of branding practices at the selected business and should not automatically be generalized to all MSMEs. In addition, the qualitative and descriptive approach was intended to explore practices and perceptions rather than statistically measure the causal effects of branding on sales or business performance.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Research Results

This section presents the findings concerning the branding strategies implemented by UD. Sona

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to strengthen its position as a micro, small, and medium-sized enterprise (MSME). The findings were obtained from interviews with six informants, field observations, and supporting documentation. The analysis focused on branding implementation, supporting and inhibiting factors, consumer perceptions, competitive positioning, repurchase intention, and opportunities for future development. The results are presented descriptively and thematically to maintain a clear distinction between the empirical evidence and its subsequent interpretation.

4.1.1. Sample Description and Descriptive Statistics

This study involved six informants selected purposively according to their roles and relevance to the research objectives. The informants represented the internal operations of UD. Sona and the external consumer perspective. Because this was a qualitative study, the participant characteristics are presented descriptively rather than through statistical measures such as means, standard deviations, or frequency distributions.

Table 1. Research Informants and Their Roles

Informant Code	Informant Category	Role in the Study
IK	Key informant	Business owner of UD. Sona
IU1	Main informant	Production division
IU2	Main informant	Packaging division
IU3	Main informant	Distribution division
IP1	Supporting informant	Consumer I
IP2	Supporting informant	Consumer II

Source: Primary data from interviews.

The business owner provided information about the overall branding strategy, promotional activities, business development, and challenges. The production, packaging, and distribution personnel provided operational perspectives on product quality, packaging, and market access. Meanwhile, the two consumers provided information concerning product recognition, perceived quality, packaging attractiveness, brand identity, accessibility, and repurchase intention. This composition enabled the study to examine branding from both internal business operations and external consumer experiences.

4.1.2. Data Quality and Preliminary Analysis

As a qualitative study, this research did not employ statistical tests of normality, multicollinearity, internal consistency, or quantitative model fit. Instead, the analysis was conducted through repeated examination of interview transcripts, categorization of relevant statements, construction of subthemes, and identification of overarching themes. Field observations were also used to document the visual identity and packaging practices of UD. Sona.

The preliminary analysis identified three overarching themes: (1) the implementation of branding strategies, (2) supporting factors and constraints affecting branding, and (3) the impacts and future development of branding strategies. The interview data were organized according to these themes to facilitate systematic interpretation of the research findings.

4.1.3. Main Analytical Results

The qualitative thematic analysis identified several interconnected findings concerning branding at UD. Sona. These findings are presented below according to the three main themes derived from the interview data.

a. Implementation of Branding Strategies

1) Direct Marketing

Direct marketing was the dominant approach used by UD. Sona to introduce its products to consumers. The business relied on direct sales, participation in MSME exhibitions and bazaars, and communication with customers. The owner explained that the products were promoted through direct selling, participation in exhibitions, partnerships with minimarkets, and social media activities (IK-09/06).

These activities allowed the business to communicate product characteristics and quality directly to prospective customers. Direct interaction also enabled consumers to obtain information about

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the products and their distinctive characteristics as traditional Nias snacks.

2) Social Media Utilization

UD. Sona used Facebook and WhatsApp as its primary active digital communication channels. Facebook was used to introduce products and distribute promotional information, while WhatsApp supported customer communication, product inquiries, and order processing. The owner confirmed that TikTok and Shopee had previously been used but were no longer active (IK-09/06).

The distribution informant also confirmed that Facebook and WhatsApp complemented direct sales, minimarket partnerships, and participation in MSME exhibitions (IU3-18/06). The two consumers reported different routes of product recognition: IP1 became familiar with the products through the surrounding community and the business location, whereas IP2 learned about the products through WhatsApp communication with the owner and shared promotional information (IP1-20/06; IP2-22/06).

3) Product Packaging

Packaging development was an important component of UD. Sona's branding strategy. The business had moved from simple transparent plastic packaging toward packaging with more attractive designs, colors, and product labels. According to the packaging informant, the revised packaging was intended to improve product presentation and strengthen recognition among consumers (IU2-15/06).

The packaging informant also emphasized cleanliness, hygiene, product safety, label information, and packaging strength as important considerations in protecting product quality (IU2-15/06). Nevertheless, transparent packaging continued to be used for some products so that consumers could see the contents directly. Consumer feedback indicated that although the packaging had improved, some transparent packages remained less practical to reseal after opening (IP1-20/06).

4) Business Partnerships and Distribution

UD. Sona expanded product availability through partnerships with minimarkets and retail stores using a consignment system. Products were delivered directly to partner outlets according to their stock requirements. The owner identified cooperation with minimarkets, including City Mart, as one of the channels used to introduce products to a broader market (IK-09/06).

However, distribution remained concentrated in Gunungsitoli City and its surrounding areas. The distribution informant explained that deliveries were conducted using a motorcycle, which limited the quantity of products that could be transported in a single trip (IU3-18/06). The relatively remote business location also made the store difficult for some consumers to find, particularly those unfamiliar with the surrounding area (IP2-22/06).

5) Brand Identity as a Traditional Nias Product

UD. Sona developed its brand identity by emphasizing local product characteristics, consistent taste, product quality, business name, labels, and packaging. Kamumu chips were identified as a distinctive product because they were considered uncommon in other markets and were associated with Nias culinary identity (IU1-12/06; IP1-20/06; IP2-22/06).

Field observations further indicated that the name SONA represents *"Saya Orang Nias Asli"* ("I am a native Nias person"). This name expresses local pride and the business's intention to promote regional products through traditional snacks. The business's identity was therefore expressed not only through promotional activities but also through its name and the distinctive characteristics of its products.

b. Supporting Factors and Constraints Affecting Branding

1) Supporting Factors

The principal supporting factor was consistent product quality. The production informant explained that quality was maintained through the selection of appropriate raw materials, cleanliness during production, and consistency in taste. The products were reported to be made without preservatives, and quality control was intended to maintain consumer satisfaction and confidence (IU1-12/06).

Other supporting factors included attractive packaging, the distinctive characteristics of kamumu chips, direct customer relationships, minimarket partnerships, and participation in MSME

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exhibitions. These elements complemented one another by helping the business introduce its products, communicate their characteristics, and maintain market presence.

2) Production Constraints

The main production constraint was the seasonal availability of kamumu as a raw material. According to the production informant, the availability of this ingredient fluctuated throughout the year, affecting the continuity and volume of production (IU1-12/06).

When kamumu was difficult to obtain, production was adjusted to the available supply. The business also shifted attention toward other products, including banana chips and kacang siput, when necessary. Weather conditions and market demand were additional factors influencing production planning.

3) Distribution Constraints

Distribution was constrained by the distance between the production location and retail partners, limited transportation capacity, and the location of the business outside the city center. The distribution informant reported that motorcycle deliveries restricted the volume transported in each trip (IU3-18/06).

To address these constraints, deliveries were scheduled according to outlet requirements, and shipment quantities were adjusted to available stock and transportation capacity. Partnerships with minimarkets and the use of social media helped reduce dependence on direct visits to the business location.

4) Promotional Constraints

Promotional activities remained limited by financial resources, available personnel, and insufficient support for broader business development. The owner reported that limited capital and resources constrained the expansion of branding and promotional activities (IK-09/06).

Although Facebook and WhatsApp remained active, other digital platforms, including TikTok and Shopee, were no longer being used. Consequently, the business continued to rely on direct marketing, existing social media channels, retail partnerships, and exhibitions to maintain product visibility.

5) Location Constraints

The location of UD. Sona presented an accessibility challenge. The production facility and store were located away from the main city center, making them less visible and more difficult to locate for consumers unfamiliar with the area. Both consumers indicated that people who did not know the precise location might need directions from local residents (IP1-20/06; IP2-22/06).

This constraint affected direct access to the store, although minimarket partnerships and social media communication provided alternative ways for consumers to discover and purchase the products.

c. Impacts and Future Development of Branding Strategies

1) Consumer Perceptions

The interviews indicated generally positive consumer perceptions of UD. Sona. Consumers associated the business with distinctive Nias snacks, satisfactory product quality, consistent taste, and the preservation of local culinary characteristics. Both consumer informants particularly recognized kamumu chips as a distinctive product that differentiated UD. Sona from other snack businesses (IP1-20/06; IP2-22/06).

Nevertheless, consumer feedback also identified areas for improvement, particularly packaging practicality, promotional reach, and the accessibility of the business location.

2) Branding and Competitive Positioning

The findings indicated that packaging improvements, product identification, direct marketing, and retail partnerships contributed to the perceived attractiveness and market visibility of UD. Sona's products. The owner reported positive effects of branding on sales, consumer interest, market reach, and competitiveness (IK-09/06).

The distribution informant also indicated that products with attractive packaging and clear identities were easier to introduce to minimarkets and consumers (IU3-18/06). However, one consumer considered the competitiveness of kamumu chips relatively limited compared with more widely recognized snack products, indicating that broader recognition remained an area for development (IP1-20/06).

3) Repurchase Intention

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The consumer interviews indicated a willingness to purchase UD. Sona products again, particularly because of their taste, quality, and distinctive regional identity. IP1 stated an intention to repurchase because the product was enjoyable and difficult to find elsewhere (IP1-20/06). IP2 reported that repurchase would depend on specific needs, such as personal consumption or purchasing souvenirs, while also emphasizing the product's distinctive taste and characteristics (IP2-22/06).

These responses suggest that product experience and perceived uniqueness were important considerations in consumers' stated willingness to purchase again. However, the findings reflect interview responses rather than measured repeat-purchase rates.

4) Future Development of Packaging, Marketing, and Distribution

The findings identified several opportunities to strengthen branding. First, packaging could be improved in terms of design, practicality, resealability, and the communication of Nias cultural identity. Second, digital promotion could be expanded to reach consumers beyond the immediate community. Third, the business could broaden partnerships with retail outlets outside Gunungsitoli City and improve transportation capacity.

The owner expressed plans to improve packaging, reactivate previously discontinued digital promotional channels, expand partnerships with stores and minimarkets, and continue participating in MSME exhibitions (IK-09/06). The consumers also recommended more practical packaging, wider digital promotion, stronger positioning as a Nias souvenir, and a more accessible sales location (IP1-20/06; IP2-22/06).

4.1.4. Hypothesis Testing Results / Key Findings

Because this study employed a qualitative research design, it did not test statistical hypotheses. Instead, the key findings address the research focus through evidence obtained from interviews and field observations.

The principal findings are as follows:

a. **Branding implementation:** UD. Sona employed direct marketing, Facebook and WhatsApp promotion, packaging development, retail partnerships, and the positioning of kamumu chips as a distinctive Nias product.
b. **Supporting factors:** Consistent product quality, distinctive local characteristics, improved packaging, customer relationships, and retail partnerships supported branding implementation.
c. **Operational constraints:** Seasonal raw-material availability, limited transportation capacity, restricted promotional resources, and an inaccessible business location constrained the expansion of branding activities.
d. **Consumer perceptions and competitiveness:** Consumers generally viewed the products positively in terms of quality, taste, and regional uniqueness, although broader brand recognition and packaging practicality remained areas for improvement.
e. **Repurchase intention and future development:** Consumers expressed willingness to purchase the products again, while the owner and consumers identified opportunities to improve packaging, digital promotion, distribution, and market accessibility.

Taken together, these findings show that UD. Sona's branding strategy combines product differentiation, direct customer engagement, visual identity development, and retail distribution. Its future development is closely associated with addressing operational constraints while strengthening the visibility and recognition of its distinctive local products.

4.1.5. Visual Presentation of Results

Field observations were conducted at UD. Sona to examine the visual identity and product packaging used as part of the business's branding strategy. The observations focused on the company logo, product packaging, and the visual elements used to communicate product identity to consumers.



Fig. 2. UD. Sona's Brand Logo

Source: Field observation documentation at UD. Sona.

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The Keripik SONA logo represents the business's local identity, which is closely associated with the culture and regional characteristics of Nias. According to the information obtained during the research, SONA stands for *"Saya Orang Nias Asli"* ("I Am a Native Nias Person"), expressing pride in local identity and the business's commitment to promoting traditional Nias products. Visually, the logo combines the brand name with illustrations of a tuber, leaves, and a traditional house. These elements contribute to the brand's visual identity and communicate its association with local products and cultural heritage.



Fig. 3. Packaging of UD. Sona's Keripik Gamumu
Source: Field observation documentation at UD. Sona.



Fig. 4. Packaging of UD. Sona's Kacang Siput
Source: Field observation documentation at UD. Sona.

The field observations also revealed that UD. Sona has developed its product packaging as part of its branding strategy. The Keripik Gamumu packaging features a predominantly red design, the product name, and a product illustration. Meanwhile, the Kacang Siput packaging combines dark and red colors, prominent product lettering, and a product image. These visual elements help communicate product identity and distinguish the products from other packaged snacks.

The observations indicate that packaging serves not only as product protection but also as a medium of brand communication. The logo establishes the business's visual identity, while product names, colors, and illustrations help consumers recognize the products. Nevertheless, maintaining consistent visual elements across product lines and strengthening promotional and distribution activities remain important considerations for developing UD. Sona's branding strategy.

4.2. Research Discussion

4.2.1. Interpretation of Key Findings

The findings indicate that UD. Sona implements its branding strategy through direct marketing, social media promotion, product packaging development, partnerships with minimarkets, and the establishment of a brand identity associated with Nias traditional snacks. These activities collectively support brand recognition, consumer trust, and product differentiation in the local snack market. The emphasis on kamumu chips as a distinctive local product also demonstrates that regional identity can serve as an important element in strengthening brand positioning among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

The findings are consistent with Kotler and Keller (2021), who emphasize the importance of business strategies in achieving an optimal market position by understanding customer needs and market developments. They also align with Nardo et al. (2024), who identify brand identity, brand image, brand communication, customer experience, consistency, and differentiation as important branding components. Furthermore, the packaging improvements, social media promotion, and retail partnerships observed at UD. Sona reflect the role of branding in shaping product identity and positive consumer perceptions, as discussed by Pramadhika et al. (2025). These findings also support Sundari and Hafani (2024), who highlight brand recognition, market positioning, consumer trust, and marketing support as important objectives of branding strategies.

4.2.2. Comparison with Previous Studies

The findings demonstrate conceptual consistency with the perspectives presented by

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Kotler and Keller (2021), Nardo et al. (2024), Pramadhika et al. (2025), and Sundari and Hafani (2024). The branding practices at UD. Sona illustrate how marketing activities, visual identity, packaging, and customer communication can be integrated to strengthen a product's market presence. In particular, the use of Nias cultural identity and traditional food products provides a distinctive dimension to the branding strategy.

However, the present study focuses specifically on one local snack business, highlighting the practical implementation of branding within the context of a regional SME. The available findings do not establish direct empirical comparisons with the specific samples, methods, or statistical results of the cited works. Therefore, the comparison is primarily conceptual, and further examination of empirical studies would be necessary to determine the extent to which the findings confirm or differ from previous research evidence.

4.2.3. Theoretical Contributions

This study contributes to the understanding of branding strategy by illustrating how brand identity, product presentation, promotional activities, and distribution arrangements operate together within a local SME. The findings suggest that branding is not limited to promotional communication; it also encompasses the visual representation of products, the preservation of local identity, and the accessibility of products to consumers.

The case of UD. Sona extends the contextual application of branding concepts by demonstrating how the cultural identity of Nias can become a source of product differentiation. The findings also indicate that the effectiveness of branding initiatives depends on their interaction with operational conditions, including seasonal raw material availability, distribution capacity, and business location. These insights provide a context-specific contribution to understanding branding among local food businesses.

4.2.4. Practical and Policy Implications

For UD. Sona, the findings indicate the importance of maintaining product quality while improving packaging consistency, strengthening the identity of Nias specialty products, and optimizing digital marketing. The business could also reactivate relevant online marketing channels, improve the accessibility of information about its business location, and expand partnerships with retail outlets beyond Gunungsitoli. These measures would help consumers recognize and access the products more easily.

At the business-development level, support from relevant local institutions could focus on digital marketing training, packaging development, business promotion through SME exhibitions, and access to broader distribution networks. Such support should reflect the operational conditions of local food producers, particularly seasonal raw material availability and the logistical challenges of reaching markets outside their immediate area.

4.2.5. Integration with the Research Gap

This study addresses the need to understand how branding strategies are implemented in the context of local SMEs producing traditional regional food products. By examining UD. Sona, the research illustrates how local identity, packaging, promotional activities, and distribution practices contribute to product recognition and differentiation. The study also identifies practical constraints that may limit the reach of branding initiatives, including seasonal raw materials, inactive digital marketing channels, limited distribution, and a business location that is difficult for some consumers to find.

Accordingly, the study provides a context-specific account of branding implementation in a local food business associated with Nias. Its contribution lies in connecting branding activities with the cultural identity of regional products and the operational conditions affecting their market accessibility. This contextual focus distinguishes the study from a general discussion of branding concepts, although the precise novelty should be assessed in relation to the research gap established in the literature review.

4.2.6. Acknowledgement of Study Limitations

The findings are based on the case of UD. Sona and therefore reflect the circumstances of a particular local snack business. The branding practices and operational constraints identified in this context may differ from those experienced by SMEs operating in other regions, product categories, or market conditions. Consequently, the

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findings should not be generalized to all SMEs without further investigation.

In addition, the findings primarily explain branding practices and their perceived contributions to product recognition, consumer trust, and market reach. The available evidence does not quantify the independent effect of each branding activity on sales performance or competitiveness. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings and assessing their applicability to other business contexts.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Summary of Key Findings

This study examined the branding strategy implemented by UD. Sona to strengthen the competitiveness of traditional Nias snack products. The findings indicate that the business applies branding through direct marketing, social media promotion, product packaging development, partnerships with minimarkets, and the promotion of kamumu chips as a distinctive local product. These activities contribute to brand recognition, consumer trust, and the development of a recognizable product identity.

Nevertheless, several challenges remain, including seasonal availability of kamumu raw materials, limited distribution, suboptimal digital promotion, and a business location that may be difficult for some consumers to find. Although existing marketing activities help introduce the products beyond the immediate business location, broader market reach requires more consistent digital promotion and stronger distribution networks.

5.2. Theoretical Contributions

The study contributes to the contextual understanding of branding by showing how visual identity, product packaging, promotional communication, and regional cultural identity can be combined within a local SME. The findings highlight the role of Nias identity as a potential source of differentiation for traditional food products. They also indicate that branding initiatives should be understood alongside the operational conditions that affect product availability and accessibility. Thus, the study provides a context-specific contribution to the application of branding concepts in local food businesses.

5.3. Practical and Policy Implications

UD. Sona should continue improving its packaging design and maintaining consistent brand elements across its product lines. The business should also strengthen its identity as a producer of Nias specialty snacks, optimize social media and online marketing activities, and expand partnerships with retail outlets and other distribution channels. Improving information about the business location and maintaining product quality are also important for increasing consumer access and trust.

Relevant local institutions may support similar SMEs through digital marketing assistance, packaging development programs, participation in local product exhibitions, and initiatives that connect businesses with wider retail and distribution networks. Such measures should account for the seasonal availability of local ingredients and the logistical challenges faced by small businesses.

5.4. Limitations of the Study

This study focuses on a single business, UD. Sona, and its specific regional and operational context. Consequently, the findings may not represent branding practices among SMEs in other locations or industries. Furthermore, the study identifies the perceived contributions of branding to recognition, trust, and market reach but does not quantify the effects of individual branding activities on sales, customer loyalty, or competitiveness. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings beyond the context examined.

5.5. Directions for Future Research

Future research could examine a broader range of SMEs producing traditional food products and compare branding strategies across different regions to identify similarities and context-specific differences. Quantitative or mixed-methods approaches could also be used to assess the relationship between branding activities and measurable outcomes, including sales performance, customer loyalty, and product competitiveness. Further research could investigate how digital marketing, packaging innovation, cultural identity, and distribution networks interact in developing the market position of local products.

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