



The influence of brand Image on the competitiveness of local products at jawet niang small and medium enterprises with purchasing decisions as a mediating variable

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ABSTRACT

Using purchase decision as a mediating variable, this study attempts to examine how brand image affects local product competitiveness in IKM Jawet Niang. Using a quantitative technique, the study was carried out in Palangka Raya City with an emphasis on a local small and medium industry (IKM). Customers who had made at least two purchases from IKM Jawet Niang were given questionnaires to complete in order to gather data. SmartPLS 4.1 was used for data processing, and 96 people made up the sample. The findings show that brand image has a favourable impact on both product competitiveness and purchase decisions, with the relationship between brand image and product competitiveness being mediated by purchase decisions. This study adds to the body of knowledge on traditional-cultured local SMEs, stresses the value of brand awareness in boosting the competitiveness of local products, and highlights how SMEs support regional economic growth while preserving ancestral culture by empowering local speciality products.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In an age of ever-increasing global competition, local businesses, particularly SMEs, encounter difficulties in preserving and enhancing the competitiveness of their products in regional and national markets. One strategic component that can enhance competitive advantage is brand image, also called brand equity. Customers' perceptions of a brand have a significant impact on their opinions of that brand, their propensity to buy that brand's products, and their level of brand loyalty.

Brand image is the perception and association that consumers have of a brand, which is formed through their experiences and interactions with the product (Kotler & Keller, 2016). In the context of local product competitiveness, brand image plays an important role in influencing consumer purchasing decisions, where these decisions can serve as a mediator between brand image and local product competitiveness. By understanding this relationship, companies can formulate more effective marketing strategies to improve their position in the market.

Building a strong brand image for SMEs goes beyond visual identity; it involves embedding values, quality, and trust in the minds of consumers. In marketing literature, brand image is a component of brand equity, which, if managed effectively, can serve as a long-term competitive advantage (Aaker, 1991). Consumers with a positive brand perception tend to be more loyal, confident in product quality, and more likely to make repeat purchases. According to Porter (1985), competitive advantage is driven by differentiation, cost leadership, and market focus. Local product competitiveness refers to the ability of regional products to compete with similar offerings in both domestic and international markets, which can be measured by product quality, innovation, competitive pricing, distribution access, and long-term sustainability (Raharjo & Ir Herrukmi Septa Rinawati, 2019). A strong brand image adds value through positive associations that are difficult for competitors to replicate, enhancing customer loyalty and perceived quality. Thus, the integration of competitive strategies, the strengthening of local product competitiveness, and effective brand management are essential for succeeding in an increasingly dynamic market.

A purchasing decision is defined by Tjiptono in Lionarto et al (2022) as follows: customers recognize a problem, research and gather information about potential brands or products to solve the problem, and then settle on one. Consumers choose and buy goods and services from a variety of options in the market based on what is known as consumer purchase decision theory (Wulandari & Mulyanto, 2024). Researchers Al Balushi et al (2024) found that consumers' emotional investment in a brand acts as a mediator between consumers' perceptions of the brand and their plans to buy. Their research also showed that customers' perceptions of a product's quality greatly affect their propensity to buy; for example, if people had a favourable impression of Innisfree products, they would be more likely to purchase those products. In addition, consumers' opinions of brands impact their buying behavior; when consumers have a favorable impression of a brand, they are more likely to be interested in buying from that brand. According to Maharani et al (2023), trust significantly impacts purchasing decisions by mediating the connection between brand image and perceptions of product quality.

This study takes IKM Jawet Niang as a case study. This IKM is a traditional craft business that is growing in Central Kalimantan, which has gone through a long process in building its brand identity. IKM Jawet Niang was rejected because there was a similarity in the name Niang with another entity in DJKI then given time to object and provide complete documents in the form of a birth certificate and KTP and thanks to assistance from the Central Kalimantan Provincial Trade and Industry Office it was finally accepted, despite experiencing rejection, IKM Jawet Niang finally succeeded in obtaining legal recognition for its brand thanks to the support of the local government, this shows how a strong brand image, based on legal protection and the right marketing strategy, can boost consumer trust and strengthen the competitiveness of local products.

In contrast to previous studies that generally only examine the influence of Brand Image on Purchasing Decisions, this study focuses on the Competitiveness of Local Products, by making Purchasing Decisions as a mediating variable. This study specifically takes the case of the Jawet Niang Small and Medium Industry (IKM). As a form of scientific contribution, this study has several aspects, namely enriching the literature on local SMEs based on traditional culture, raising the importance of brand awareness in increasing the competitiveness of local products, strengthening the role of SMEs in driving the regional economy, contributing to preserving ancestral culture through the empowerment of local products typical of the region. Thus, this research is expected to provide a more comprehensive knowledge of how brand image and purchase decisions affect the competitiveness of local products, particularly in the context of the Jawet Niang SME. Based on this backdrop, it is critical to investigate the impact of

brand image on the competitiveness of local products, as perceived by the Jawet Niang SME, using purchase decisions as a mediating variable.

There are several research gaps in understanding the relationship between brand image, purchasing decisions, and the competitiveness of local products in the context of traditional culture-based MSMEs. One gap is the lack of studies exploring how traditional cultural elements can be integrated into branding strategies to enhance product competitiveness. Additionally, there is insufficient research on how consumers perceive the authenticity of cultural elements in these products and how this perception influences purchasing decisions. Furthermore, while digital marketing has been studied broadly, its application in promoting traditional culture-based MSMEs is underexplored. Another gap is the limited focus on emotional branding in traditional MSMEs, particularly how emotional connections with consumers can shape brand identity and influence buying behavior. Finally, the role of packaging, especially packaging that reflects traditional cultural elements, in enhancing product competitiveness remains largely unexplored. Addressing these gaps could provide valuable insights into how MSMEs can strengthen their market position by leveraging culture, branding, and consumer perceptions.

Several factors contribute to the lagging competitiveness of local products, even those with high cultural value and local wisdom, such as IKM Jawet Niang. One of the key challenges is limited brand recognition and marketing. Local products often lack strong brand awareness compared to non-local products, which benefit from larger marketing budgets and extensive advertising campaigns. This lack of visibility can significantly hinder their marketability. Additionally, local products may face legal and certification challenges. As seen with IKM Jawet Niang's initial struggles with brand registration, obtaining legal protection and certifications can be a complex and time-consuming process, making it difficult for local products to establish credibility in the market. Access to distribution networks is another crucial factor; local SMEs often struggle to create efficient distribution channels that allow them to compete with larger, non-local companies that have established and widespread supply chains. Furthermore, while local products may possess unique cultural value, they may lack the innovation in product design or features necessary to make them competitive in the global market. Consumer perception and trust also play a significant role. Non-local products, particularly those from well-known brands, often enjoy higher consumer trust due to perceptions of superior quality, reliability, or prestige, which can make it challenging for local products to compete. Lastly, local products may struggle with pricing strategy. Due to higher production costs, limited scale, and inefficiencies, they may find it difficult to set competitive prices when compared to mass-produced, non-local products. These factors collectively contribute to the competitiveness gap between local and non-local products.

2. METHODS

This study aims to investigate the influence of brand image and purchasing decisions on the competitiveness of local products, employing a quantitative approach through numerical analysis and statistical testing. It explores the causal relationship between the independent variable (brand image) and the dependent variable (local product competitiveness), with purchasing decisions acting as a mediating variable.

It is comprised of three operational variables: brand image (X), purchasing decisions (Z), and local product competitiveness (Y). The 96 clients of Jawet Niang SMEs were the focus of this research. The Rao Purba formula was utilized to ascertain the sample size, as the population size could not be known with absolute certainty. Customers who have made a minimum of two purchases make up this sample. Sugiyono (2019) states that data was gathered by means of an online Google Forms

survey featuring a Likert scale. Survey results served as the major data source, with supplementary information culled from books, scholarly journals, and institutional reports (Hardani et al., 2020). Doing so guaranteed that the data gathered was legitimate, unbiased, and pertinent to the study's focus.

The determination of a sample size of 96 respondents in this study is based on the Rao Purba formula, which was used due to the uncertainty of the total population size of IKM Jawet Niang consumers. This sample size is considered appropriate for ensuring statistical power and validity, as it captures a representative subset of customers who have made at least two purchases, allowing for reliable inferences regarding the general population of IKM Jawet Niang consumers. However, while the sample size may be sufficient for this research, its generalizability to all consumers is contingent upon the assumption that the sample accurately reflects the broader customer base in terms of demographics and purchasing behavior.

To give a numerical description of data features, descriptive analysis is employed (Lawless & Heymann, 2010). To give a numerical description of data features, descriptive analysis is employed. To make sure the data is accurate and comprehensive, it is examined. Respondent scores are computed to ascertain the degree to which responses fall into a specific category. The research instrument's reliability is assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, convergent validity, and discriminant validity in the outer model, also known as the measurement model (Hardani et al., 2020; Kasmir, 2022). The R2 value indicates how well the structural model can account for the dependent variable in terms of the independent variables. Path coefficient analysis and t-tests are used to examine the direction of the relationship between variables and the partial effect of the independent and dependent variables, respectively, in order to test hypotheses. A significance level below 0.05 indicates that independent variables significantly impact dependent variables (Kasmir, 2022).

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of the data analysis are presented in two parts. First, the measurement model is reviewed to ensure that the constructs are reliable and valid. This stage contains the validity test, which is then analysed using convergent validity.

	X	Y	Z
X.1	0.814		
X.2	0.803		
X.3	0.797		
X.4	0.812		
Y.1		0.725	
Y.2		0.805	
Y.3		0.779	
Y.4		0.821	
Y.5		0.806	
Z.1			0.763
Z.2			0.845
Z.3			0.866
Z.4			0.892
Z.5			0.917

Source: Results of data analysis using SmartPLS 4.1, 2025

Table 3 shows that the three factors employed in this study Brand Image, Local Product Competitiveness, and Purchasing Decision have a loading factor of > 0.7 in the questionnaire items reflecting each variable. As a result, the statements representing each variable fit the criteria and are worthy of investigation.

Table 2. Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

	Average variance extracted (AVE)	
X		0.651
Y		0.621
Z		0.737

Source: Results of data analysis using SmartPLS 4.1, 2025

In addition to detecting outer loading, convergent validity can be assessed using the AVE value. Based on table 4, each variable employed in this study has an AVE value of > 0.5 , indicating that all constructs are declared legitimate. In addition to convergent validity, we also utilise discriminant validity tests to determine whether a construct is actually distinct from other constructs in the model.

Table 3. Cross Loading Values

	X	Y	Z
X.1	0.814	0.621	0.545
X.2	0.803	0.682	0.635
X.3	0.797	0.700	0.643
X.4	0.812	0.579	0.551
Y.1	0.625	0.725	0.685
Y.2	0.631	0.805	0.653
Y.3	0.658	0.779	0.620
Y.4	0.573	0.821	0.579
Y.5	0.672	0.806	0.659
Z.1	0.634	0.648	0.763
Z.2	0.613	0.711	0.845
Z.3	0.587	0.658	0.866
Z.4	0.647	0.740	0.892
Z.5	0.689	0.731	0.917

Source: Results of data analysis using SmartPLS 4.1, 2025

“Table 5 shows that the assumed correlation of the indicator with its latent variable is stronger than the correlation with other latent variables. A reliability test is essential to ensure that the analysis results are valid. This study's reliability tests included Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values.

Table 4. Cronbach's Alpha value

	Cronbach's alpha
X	0.822
Y	0.847
Z	0.909

Source: Results of data analysis using SmartPLS 4.1, 2025

Table 6 shows that the Cronbach's alpha values for each construct > 0.60 . Thus, based on Cronbach's alpha, all constructs in this study have a pretty high reliability value when compared to the minimal needed limit.

Table 5. Composite Reliability Values

	Composite Reliability
X	0.882
Y	0.891
Z	0.933

Source: Results of data analysis using SmartPLS 4.1, 2025

Table 7 shows that the composite reliability values for each construct are more than 0.070. Thus, based on composite reliability, all constructions in this investigation have a pretty good dependability value when compared to the minimum needed limit.

Table 6. R-Square Value

	R-square	Adjusted R-square
Y	0.754	0.749
Z	0.548	0.543

Source: Results of data analysis using SmartPLS 4.1, 2025

According to table 8, the R-Square value on the Local Product Competitiveness variable (Y) is 0.754, indicating that 75.4% of the Brand Image and Purchasing Decision variables can influence the Competitiveness of Local Products, while the remaining 24.6% is influenced by unstudied factors. Likewise, the Purchase Decision variable (Z) has an R-Square value.0.548 where these results show that 54.8% of the Brand Image variable can influence Purchasing Decisions, and the other 45.2% is influenced by other factors not studied. The high R-Square value (75.4%) highlights the significant role that brand image and purchasing decisions play in driving the competitiveness of local products. This means businesses should focus on improving their brand image and consumer engagement through strategic marketing, branding, and customer experience initiatives. Investments in enhancing brand perception, quality, and reputation could provide a substantial return by boosting the competitive position of local products in the market. The remaining 24.6% represents unexamined factors that also contribute to the competitiveness of local products. These could include aspects like pricing strategies, distribution channels, customer loyalty, product innovation, or external economic factors. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of competitiveness, businesses and researchers may need to explore these additional factors further. Identifying and addressing these influences could further strengthen the competitive edge of local products.

Table 7. Path Coefficient Test

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
X -> Y	0.447	0.453	0.104	4,304	0.000
X -> Z	0.740	0.717	0.110	6,759	0.000
Z -> Y	0.484	0.467	0.103	4,699	0.000

Source: Results of data analysis using SmartPLS 4.1, 2025

The first hypothesis test findings show that the original sample value is 0.447, with a p-value of $0.000 < 0.05$ and a T-statistic of $4.304 > 1.96$, indicating that Brand Image has a positive and significant effect on the competitiveness of local products. The second hypothesis test findings show that the original value of the variable sample is 0.740 with a p value of $0.000 < 0.05$ and a T statistic of $6.759 > 1.96$. This indicates that Brand Image has a positive and significant effect on Purchasing Decisions. The final hypothesis test findings show that the original sample value is 0.467, with a p-value of $0.000 < 0.05$ and a T-statistic of $4.699 > 1.96$, indicating that purchasing decisions have a positive and substantial effect on the competitiveness of local products.

Table 8. Specific Indirect Effect

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
X -> Z -> Y	0.358	0.335	0.093	3,836	0.000

Source: Results of data analysis using SmartPLS 4.1, 2025

The fourth hypothesis test findings demonstrate that purchasing decisions can positively mediate the influence of brand image on the competitiveness of local products, with the p-value being $0.000 < 0.05$, the T-statistic being $3.836 > 1.96$, and the original sample having a positive value.”

The study's initial hypothesis was the effect of brand image on the competitiveness of local products. The results from the Smart PLS analysis tool

revealed that the brand image variable had a large and favourable impact on the competitiveness of local products. This was demonstrated by a t-statistic value more than 1.96, specifically 4.304 higher than 1.96. Additionally, the p-value ($0.000 < 0.05$) indicates statistical significance. According to the test results, IKM Jawet Niang customers believe that brand image influences the company's competitiveness when compared to SMEs. These findings are in line with the brand equity theory proposed by Aaker (1991), which states that brand image is an important dimension in creating added value to a product through positive brand associations. In the context of Jawet Niang SMEs, a good brand image provides consumers with a perception of higher quality, uniqueness, and cultural value, thereby strengthening the position of local products in the competitive market. This finding is supported by study conducted by Wahyuni & Susilo (2025), who discovered that brand image plays a significant role in promoting product competitiveness by influencing consumer perceptions of product value. This demonstrates that the success of local businesses is determined on consumer views of the brand's image and reputation, as well as product quality.

The second hypothesis discussed in this study is the effect of purchasing decisions on the competitiveness of local products. The results of the test conducted using the Smart PLS analysis tool show that the purchasing decision variable has a positive and significant effect on the competitiveness of local products. This can be seen from the t-statistic value which is greater than 1.96, namely $4.699 > 1.96$. In addition, the results can be seen from the p-value which has met the requirements of a p-value smaller than 0.05, namely $0.000 < 0.05$. The results of this test indicate that customers of the Jawet Niang Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs) agree that Purchasing Decisions effect the Competitiveness of Local Products at the Jawet Niang Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs). These results indicate that consumer behavior in choosing and purchasing local products has a significant contribution to the competitiveness of SMEs. The higher the tendency of consumers to make purchases, the stronger the position of the product in the market. This finding is in line with research by Sofirin (2023), which emphasizes that consumer purchasing decisions can drive increased competitiveness, as they are an indicator of market acceptance of a product. From a strategic marketing perspective, purchasing decisions reflect the effectiveness of all marketing strategies implemented, including aspects of price, promotion, quality, and brand.

The impact of consumers' perceptions of brands on their final purchase decisions is the subject of the third hypothesis tested here. Results from experiments conducted with the Smart PLS analysis tool show that consumers' perceptions of a brand significantly impact their propensity to buy. The fact that the t-statistic value is higher than 1.96 ($6.759 > 1.96$) proves this. In addition, the results fulfilled the requirement for a p-value less than 0.05, as the p-value ($0.000 < 0.05$) shows. Brand impression significantly influences customers' purchase decisions in a positive way, according to the analysis. This shows how customers' beliefs and preferences are influenced by their opinions about a brand when they make purchasing decisions. Lavidge & Steiner (1961) Hierarchy of Effects theory states that buyers go through three distinct phases—cognitive, affective, and conative—before settling on a purchase. Emotional engagement is crucial in shaping consumer behavior, as this process demonstrates. Supporting this idea, Maharani et al (2023) discovered that consumers' perceptions of a brand's image greatly influence their purchasing decisions. This is because positive brand images inspire loyalty, confidence, and a sense of value in the products.

The novelty of this research lies in its focus on traditional culture-based Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), specifically IKM Jawet Niang, exploring the role of brand image in enhancing local product competitiveness. Unlike previous studies that examine brand image predominantly in non-traditional or large company contexts, this

research investigates how cultural and traditional values embedded in the brand image influence local consumer purchasing decisions and the competitiveness of small businesses. By introducing purchasing decisions as a mediating variable, this study offers a unique perspective on the dynamic relationship between consumer behavior and market success, highlighting how SMEs can leverage cultural heritage and brand identity to strengthen their competitive position. Despite the valuable insights provided, several research gaps remain in the relationship between brand image, purchasing decisions, and the competitiveness of local products in the context of traditional culture-based MSMEs. These include limited exploration of how cultural authenticity in brand image influences consumer emotions and purchasing behavior, as well as the role of local traditions in shaping competitive strategies. Moreover, the impact of digital marketing on traditional SMEs, particularly how brand image can be effectively communicated through digital platforms, has not been extensively studied. Future research could also explore emotional branding strategies and the mediating role of trust in purchasing decisions, offering new avenues for improving the competitiveness of local products in both domestic and international markets.

As the fourth hypothesis examined in this study, the effect of brand image on the competitiveness of local products through purchasing decisions. Through purchasing decisions, brand image variables significantly and favourably affect the competitiveness of local products, according to test results conducted using the Smart PLS analysis tool (Shen & Ahmad, 2022). A t-statistic value greater than 1.96, or 3.836, indicates that purchasing decisions mediate the effect of brand image on the competitiveness of local products, according to mediation studies. Furthermore, the results satisfy the p value criteria of less than 0.05, as indicated by the p value ($0.000 < 0.05$). This implies that brand image has both a direct and indirect effect through an increase in purchase decisions. This demonstrates how a strong brand will entice customers to buy, and these purchases will eventually increase the competitiveness of goods on the market. This finding is similar with Febrianti & Hasan (2022) research, which found that purchasing decisions might act as a mediating variable, increasing the influence of brand image on competitiveness or market performance. In the context of Jawet Niang SMEs, a good brand image not only provides a pleasant perception but also motivates consumers to take real actions, specifically purchases, which increases the prospects for growth and sustainability of local enterprises.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The local product market is significantly influenced by a strong and positive brand image. For Jawet Niang SMEs, cultivating a positive brand image can enhance competitiveness, reduce consumer distrust, and foster emotional attachment to the brand. Purchasing decisions, as a key channel for SMEs to increase competitiveness, also play a significant and positive role in shaping the market position of local products. Consumers are more likely to make a purchase when they have a favorable perception of the Jawet Niang brand, demonstrating the importance of consumer behavior in sustaining traditional local culture and supporting the growth of SMEs. Notably, purchasing decisions mediate the relationship between brand image and product competitiveness. While this study offers valuable insights, its findings may not be widely applicable across different cultural contexts, as it only focused on one SME. Future research could adopt qualitative methodologies to explore in greater depth the emotional aspects of consumer perceptions toward local brands, particularly to understand the underlying emotions that drive purchasing decisions. Additionally, expanding the scope of the study to include a variety of SMEs from different regions would provide a more comprehensive view of the factors that

influence competitiveness in culture-based SMEs. These results have important policy implications, suggesting that culture-driven branding strategies and tailored capacity-building programs could enhance SMEs' ability to respond to consumer behavior. Lastly, this research underscores the significance of consumers' perceptions of brands and their purchasing habits in enhancing the long-term sustainability of regional products in global markets, ultimately helping to preserve traditional practices. This research offers valuable insights for local policymakers in strengthening the brand image of local products and improving their competitiveness in the national market. The study emphasizes the significant impact of a positive brand image and consumer purchasing decisions on product competitiveness. Policymakers can use these findings to implement strategies that focus on culture-driven branding, consumer behavior understanding, and providing SMEs with the tools to build emotional connections with customers. By supporting SMEs with training and resources, local governments can enhance their market presence, fostering sustainable growth and increasing their competitiveness in the national market.

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