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DIFFERENTIATION STRATEGY BASED ON ISLAMIC ECONOMIC VALUES IN ENHANCING THE COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE OF DUA BERKAH BINJAI BAKERY

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Abstract: *This study aims to analyze the product differentiation strategy implemented by the Dua Berkah Binjai Bakery SME in enhancing its competitive advantage based on Islamic economic values. The research approach used is a descriptive qualitative method through in-depth interviews, direct observation, and sales document analysis supported by NVivo software. The results of the study indicate that the success of the Dua Berkah Binjai Bakery business is not only determined by product quality, affordable prices, and distribution networks through resellers, but also by the application of Islamic economic values such as honesty, trustworthiness, and the principles of halal and thayyib in the production process. These values create consumer trust, which is an important factor in maintaining customer loyalty. However, this business still faces several challenges, such as limited product innovation, distribution delays, and weak digital branding, which can hinder market expansion. Therefore, this study recommends strengthening product innovation, optimizing digital marketing, and consistently applying Islamic economic principles in business activities in order to increase competitiveness and business sustainability.*

Keywords: *Product Differentiation, Competitive Advantage, MSMEs, Islamic Economics.*

INTRODUCTION

Competition among micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in the food sector, particularly in the bread and cake industry, is becoming increasingly fierce as the number of new businesses grows. Theory states that business success is not only determined by low prices, but also by product differentiation through innovation, quality, and brand image (Kotler & Keller, 2016). However, reality shows that not all MSMEs are able to maximize their differentiation strategies, so that consumer purchasing power growth is not in line with existing market potential (Agyapong & Acquah, 2022). Product differentiation is believed to be able to increase consumer loyalty while strengthening the competitiveness of MSMEs. International studies show that product innovation and quality are important factors in creating sustainable competitive advantage (Li & Zhang, 2024). However, many MSMEs in Indonesia still face obstacles in the form of limited capital, distribution delays, and minimal digital marketing, so that the application of differentiation is not fully effective (Ahmed & Rahman, 2023).

The real situation can be seen in the case of Roti Dua Berkah Binjai SME, which has attempted to differentiate itself by offering product variations such as brownies, sagon bakar, and baked sponge cake. In theory, product variation can increase consumer interest in purchasing, but in practice, new menu innovations are still limited, so existing consumers may experience boredom (Wang & Liu, 2023). This indicates a gap between the ideal theory of differentiation and its implementation in the field. From a marketing perspective, theory asserts that digital marketing is a key factor in expanding the market and increasing brand awareness for MSMEs (Dwivedi et al., 2021). However, Roti Dua Berkah Binjai still relies heavily on distribution through a network of local resellers with word-of-mouth promotion. Previous research emphasizes that digital marketing strategies can expand consumer segments and strengthen the competitive position of small businesses (Ahmed & Rahman, 2023). Table 1 below shows Roti Dua Berkah Binjai's sales data for 2024.

| No | Month | Sales | | | | | Quantity |
|----|----------|------------|-------------|-------------------|-----------------------|-------------|-------------|
| | | Brownies | Baked sagon | Baked sponge cake | Mini fish sponge cake | Ring donuts | |
| 1 | January | 1.847 Pack | 623 Pack | 2.235 Pack | 1.956 Pack | 1.389 Pack | 8.050 Pack |
| 2 | February | 1.523 Pack | 456 Pack | 1.789 Pack | 1.634 Pack | 1.156 Pack | 6.558 Pack |
| 3 | March | 2.156 Pack | 734 Pack | 2.560 Pack | 2.289 Pack | 1.675 Pack | 9.414 Pack |
| 4 | April | 2.789 Pack | 923 Pack | 3.145 Pack | 2.834 Pack | 2.167 Pack | 11.858 Pack |
| 5 | May | 1.678 Pack | 534 Pack | 2.023 Pack | 1.756 Pack | 1.234 Pack | 7.225 Pack |
| 6 | June | 1.457 Pack | 467 Pack | 1.834 Pack | 1.567 Pack | 1.089 Pack | 6.414 Pack |

| | | | | | | | |
|----|-----------|----------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|-------------|---------------|
| 7 | July | 1.230 Pack | 398 Pack | 1.623 Pack | 1.345 Pack | 978 Pack | 5.574 Pack |
| 8 | August | 1.567 Pack | 489 Pack | 1.789 Pack | 1.534 Pack | 1.156 Pack | 6.535 Pack |
| 9 | September | 1.345 Pack | 423 Pack | 1.567 Pack | 1.389 Pack | 1.034 Pack | 5.758 Pack |
| 10 | October | 1.289 Pack | 389 Pack | 1.456 Pack | 1.267 Pack | 967 Pack | 5.368 Pack |
| 11 | November | 1.156 Pack | 356 Pack | 1.345 Pack | 1.189 Pack | 889 Pack | 4.935 Pack |
| 12 | December | 1.460 Pack | 450 Pack | 1.670 Pack | 1.460 Pack | 1.020 Pack | 6.060 Pack |
| | Quantity | 19.497 Pack | 6.242 Pack | 23.036 Pack | 20.220 Pack | 14.754 Pack | 83.749 Pack |

The data in the table shows fluctuations in sales, with the highest peak in April at 11,858 packs and a sharp decline in November at 4,935 packs. Theoretically, consistent product differentiation should be able to maintain sales stability throughout the year (Haseeb et al., 2022). However, in the case of Roti Dua Berkah Binjai, sales patterns still depend on seasonal moments such as Ramadan, so the differentiation strategy has not fully functioned as a sales stabilizer. From a quality perspective, international research confirms that consistency in raw material quality is a fundamental element in sustainable differentiation (Li & Zhang, 2024).

Roti Dua Berkah Binjai has been relatively successful in maintaining taste consistency, but it is weak in terms of packaging and branding, which should be able to enhance the brand image and emotional value of the product (Martins & Ferreira, 2023). This discrepancy between theory and practice shows that quality alone is not enough without innovation and a strong brand strategy. Product differentiation is understood as a strategic effort to create uniqueness and added value so that a product can stand out among competitors. In the context of MSMEs, especially in the food sector, differentiation does not only refer to product variation, but also includes quality consistency, innovation, service, and brand image. In addition, competitive advantage reflects a business's ability to offer superior value compared to its competitors. This advantage can be achieved through product uniqueness, operational efficiency, and responsiveness to consumer needs.

In the food industry, differentiation strategies can be implemented through maintaining raw material quality, developing product variations, improving packaging design, and providing satisfying services. However, many MSMEs still face limitations in innovation, marketing, and distribution. From an Islamic economic perspective, business activities are guided not only by profit but also by ethical values such as honesty (*ṣidq*), trustworthiness (*amanah*), and excellence (*ihsan*). The principles of halal and *thayyib* ensure that products are lawful, safe, and beneficial, thereby strengthening consumer trust and business sustainability.

Problems are also evident in distribution. Theory states that fast and timely distribution is a form of service differentiation that can increase customer satisfaction (Singh & Mishra, 2022). However, in practice, there are still delivery delays due to fleet limitations, so

consumers consider the distribution service to be suboptimal. This weakens competitiveness because consumers easily switch to more responsive competitor products. In addition, minimal product innovation worsens the competitive position. International studies emphasize that regular new menu innovations can increase purchasing interest and strengthen consumer loyalty (Wang & Liu, 2023). However, at Roti Dua Berkah Binjai, the menu variety tends to be monotonous, which has an impact on the boredom of regular consumers. This proves that differentiation without continuous innovation will not be able to maintain competitiveness (Soemitra et al., 2022).

Based on this description, it appears that the differentiation strategy implemented by Roti Dua Berkah Binjai is still more effective in retaining old customers than attracting new ones. Theory states that differentiation should be able to expand market share, enhance brand image, and strengthen customer loyalty (Martins & Ferreira, 2023). However, the reality in the field shows that product, distribution, and branding differentiation are not yet optimal, so competitiveness is still local and defensive. The novelty of this research lies in its difference from previous studies.

The research by Agyapong and Acquah (2022) focused on co-creation-based differentiation to increase customer loyalty, while the research by Ahmed and Rahman (2023) emphasized product innovation and digital marketing in increasing the competitiveness of MSMEs. In contrast, this study integrates the analysis of product differentiation, distribution, and branding with empirical sales data from Roti Dua Berkah Binjai throughout 2024. This novelty provides a real picture of how inconsistent differentiation strategies can hinder market expansion, so the results of this study are expected to contribute academically and practically to the development of food MSME strategies. Therefore, research on the effectiveness of differentiation strategies in Binjai's Roti Dua Berkah SMEs is important. This study not only enriches the literature on product differentiation and competitive advantage but also provides practical solutions for local food SMEs to increase sales, expand markets, and survive increasingly dynamic competition.

In addition to conventional economic aspects, product differentiation strategies in the context of MSMEs can also be viewed from an Islamic economic perspective. In Islam, economic activities are not only aimed at making a profit, but also contain moral and spiritual values that must be carried out honestly, fairly, and responsibly. Islamic business ethics principles such as honesty (ṣidq), trustworthiness, and social responsibility are important foundations in building consumer trust and business sustainability (Nasution & Yarham, 2023).

The principles of halal and thayyib are important foundations in food production, as explained in the Qur'an in :

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ كُلُوا مِمَّا فِي الْأَرْضِ حَلَالًا طَيِّبًا وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا خُطُوَاتِ الشَّيْطَانِ إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ

“O mankind, eat from whatever is on earth [that is] lawful and good and do not follow the footsteps of Satan. Indeed, he is to you a clear enemy.” (QS. Al-Baqarah: 168)

Which commands humans to consume food that is halal and good. In the context of the modern economy, the concept of halal is not only related to religious aspects, but also reflects the quality, safety, and hygiene of the products produced (Da'mai, 2024). Therefore, the application of product differentiation strategies based on Islamic economic values not only improves product quality, but also strengthens consumer trust and creates added value in business competition.

In the context of the Roti Dua Berkah Binjai business, the application of Islamic economic values can be reflected in the use of halal raw materials, hygienic production processes, and the commitment of business actors to maintain consistent product quality. Values such as trustworthiness, honesty, and responsibility are important factors in building long-term relationships with consumers. Thus, the integration of product differentiation strategies and Islamic economic principles can be an effective approach in enhancing the competitive advantage of MSMEs amid increasingly dynamic competition in the food industry (Syahfitri, Jannah, & Syahriza, 2024).

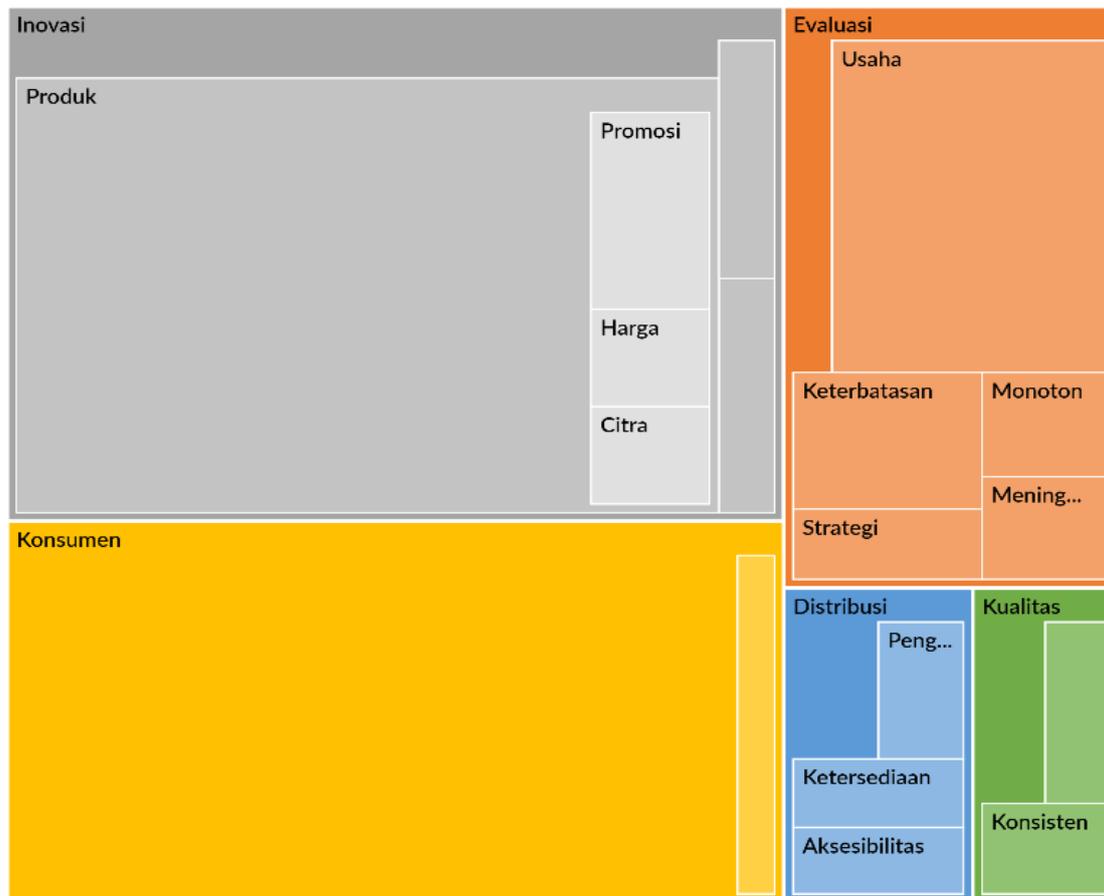
RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative analysis method assisted by NVivo 15 software, with the support of simple quantitative data. This approach was chosen to describe and understand in depth how product differentiation strategies are applied by Roti Dua Berkah Binjai in increasing its competitive advantage in the local market. NVivo 15 was used as a tool to assist in the processing and analysis of qualitative data so that the results obtained were more systematic and valid. Through features such as coding references, text search queries, treemaps, and project maps, researchers were able to identify patterns, themes, and relationships between categories in the interview transcripts. Qualitative data was obtained through in-depth interviews with the owner, employees, and consumers, while quantitative data was obtained from annual sales documentation to support descriptive analysis of sales growth and the effectiveness of the differentiation strategy.

This research was conducted at Roti Dua Berkah Binjai, a micro, small, and medium enterprise (MSME) located in Binjai City, North Sumatra. The location was chosen deliberately (purposive sampling) because Roti Dua Berkah is one of the local bakeries that consistently implements flavor innovations and menu variations in the face of market competition. The research was conducted from May to July 2024, covering the stages of preparation, data collection, data processing, and analysis of results using NVivo 15. The research subjects included the business owner, two production employees, and two regular consumers, while the object was product differentiation strategies, which included aspects of innovation, raw material quality, service, and sharia economic values applied in business activities.

Data analysis was conducted by adapting the Miles and Huberman model, which consisted of three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing, then further processed with the help of NVivo 15 to strengthen the accuracy of the results. The coding feature in NVivo was used to group the interview results based on main themes

Hierarchy Diagram



Source: Processed Data 2025

Based on the treemap visualization above, which shows a comparison of the number of coding references from the NVivo analysis results, it can be seen that the themes “Product” and “Consumer” dominate with the largest area. This indicates that these two themes appeared most frequently in the interview results and became the main focus of the study. The “Product” theme covers sub-themes such as promotion, price, and image, which indicate that the differentiation aspects of Roti Dua Berkah Binjai products are largely related to how the products are marketed, consumer perceptions of the brand, and assessments of affordability. Meanwhile, the “Consumer” theme is the center of attention because it reflects customers' direct responses to the quality, taste, and loyalty to the product.

In addition, medium-sized areas such as “Evaluation,” “Distribution,” and “Quality” indicate that internal operational aspects are also an important part of the differentiation strategy. For example, “Evaluation” is related to the business owner's efforts to conduct regular reviews of production, while ‘Distribution’ and “Quality” are related to the business's ability to maintain supply stability and product quality. Sub-themes such as “Limitations,” “Monotony,” and “Consistency” illustrate a balance between strengths and weaknesses: on the one hand, the product is recognized for its consistent quality, but on the other hand, its variety is still considered monotonous. Overall, this treemap shows that

effective product differentiation at Roti Dua Berkah Binjai is greatly influenced by quality, innovation, routine evaluation, and consumers' positive perceptions of price and taste.

Word Query Search

Next is an analysis of word usage in word frequency from various research data sources, which can be viewed through the word query search or Text Search Query feature. This feature is applied to understand the meaning and context of the use of the word “product” which appears dominantly in the word cloud analysis results (NVIVO QSR International, 2021b). The researcher wanted to understand that the word “product” was the main keyword frequently mentioned by informants, as it was directly related to the research topic on the effectiveness of product differentiation strategies in increasing the competitive advantage of Roti Dua Berkah Binjai. The search results are displayed in the form of a word tree as shown in Figure 5. Through exploration of the word tree feature, it was found that the word “product” often appeared in the context of discussions about quality, taste, innovation, promotion, and distribution. Business owner informants emphasized that they strive to maintain the taste and quality of their products so that they remain consistent from the past to the present, because this is the main reason consumers continue to trust and choose Roti Dua Berkah Binjai products. Meanwhile, informants from the production department added that each batch of dough is always tasted before baking to ensure that the product quality meets standards. Consumers also consider this product to have a distinctive taste and affordable price, although some hope that there will be additional flavor variations so that it is not monotonous.



Source: Processed Data 2025

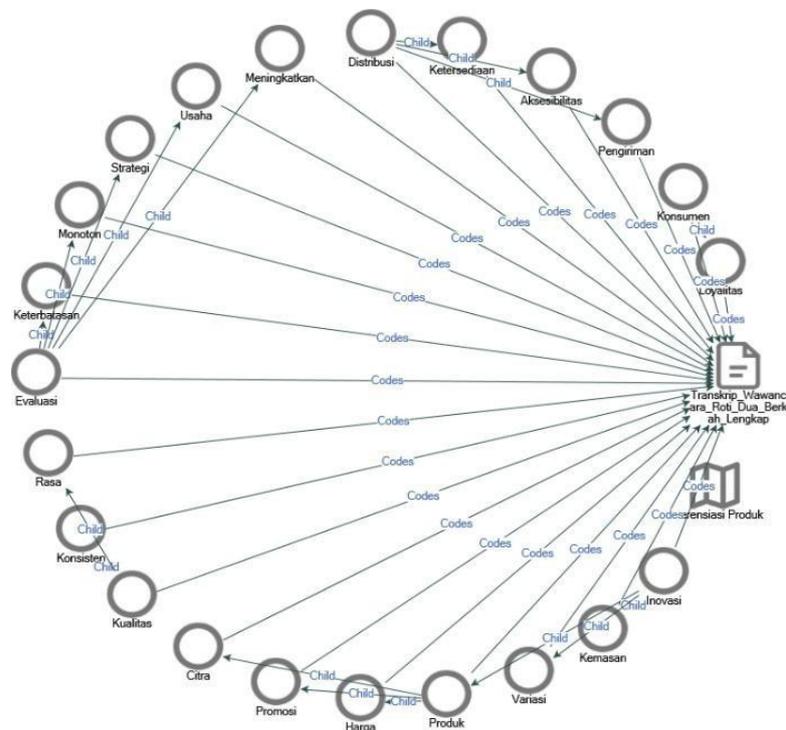
The word tree results also show that discussions of the word “product” are often associated with limited resources, word-of-mouth promotion, and simple packaging. However, consumers still respond positively to the taste and consistency offered. This

shows that the main strength of Roti Dua Berkah Binjai's differentiation lies in its taste quality and customer trust. This finding aligns with Kotler and Keller's (2016) view that quality and consistency are key factors in building consumer loyalty to a brand. Based on the author's understanding, the results of this analysis provide a comprehensive picture of how the word “product” reflects the core of the differentiation strategy implemented by Roti Dua Berkah Binjai. The product is not only seen as the result of bread production, but also as a representation of the values of trust, satisfaction, and consumer experience. This study shows that business success is not only determined by innovation in taste or form, but also by the ability to maintain quality and meet customer expectations on an ongoing basis. Thus, this Text Search Query analysis reinforces the finding that focusing on product quality and consistency is a key strategy in maintaining the competitive advantage of Roti Dua Berkah Binjai.

Project Map

The researchers then used a project map to show the correlations between informants who were mutually related in providing information about product differentiation strategies to increase the competitive advantage of Roti Dua Berkah Binjai. The project map was created based on themes coded from interviews that had been analyzed using NVivo 12 Plus software. This map serves to explore and present the relationships between themes related to product development strategies, innovation, promotion, and consumer perceptions of product quality and superiority.

Based on the results of the project map, several important findings were obtained that describe the relationships between the research variables.



Source: Processed Data 2025

First, the strategy to maintain product quality is carried out by ensuring consistency in taste, using raw materials from the same suppliers, and conducting regular production evaluations by business owners. Second, the product innovation strategy, although still limited, shows continuous efforts to develop new flavor variants through trial stages or test batches. Third, the product promotion and image strategy, in which business actors still rely on word-of-mouth promotion and reseller networks, but are beginning to plan to expand their marketing reach by utilizing social media. Fourth, the distribution strategy, which focuses on ease of product access through local resellers despite still facing delivery fleet constraints. In addition, the project map results also show supporting themes that strengthen the relationship between differentiation strategy components, such as business evaluation, human resource limitations, consumer loyalty, and product accessibility. Informants mentioned that flavor consistency is a major factor in attracting and retaining customers. This is in line with Kotler & Keller (2016), who state that product differentiation must focus on creating added value that is directly felt by consumers. Meanwhile, obstacles such as labor limitations, monotonous menu variations, and distribution delays are challenges that need to be addressed immediately in order to optimize the differentiation strategy.

The findings of this study are also in line with Michael E. Porter's (1985) theory, which emphasizes that competitive advantage can be achieved through continuous innovation, operational efficiency, and a deep understanding of consumer needs and desires. Thus, the differentiation strategy implemented by Roti Dua Berkah Binjai has proven effective in maintaining its competitiveness in the local market. The author assesses that this Project Map provides a comprehensive overview of how all components, from quality, innovation, promotion, to customer satisfaction, interact to form a sustainable competitive advantage for Roti Dua Berkah Binjai.

Discussion

The results of the analysis using NVivo 12 Plus software show that the product differentiation strategy implemented by Roti Dua Berkah Binjai plays an important role in shaping competitive advantage through consistency in quality, product innovation, and customer satisfaction. Findings from Word Cloud, Treemap, Text Search Query, and Project Map analyses illustrate the close relationship between internal factors (production, promotion, evaluation, and distribution) and external consumer perceptions of product quality and competitiveness.

Focus on Quality and Customer Satisfaction

The Word Cloud results show that the words “product,” “consumer,” and “production” dominate the interview discussions. This confirms that the main focus of Roti Dua Berkah Binjai's differentiation strategy lies in maintaining taste quality and customer satisfaction. Business operators consistently ensure that every product produced has a stable taste through raw material supervision and routine tasting processes. This consistency in taste and quality is the main reason consumers remain loyal, even though the variety of menus offered is not yet extensive. This finding aligns with Kotler and Keller's (2016) view that quality and consistency are key elements in creating customer

loyalty and strengthening a brand's position in the market. By maintaining the same quality standards since its inception, Roti Dua Berkah Binjai has successfully retained customer trust and strengthened its product image.

Relationship Between Production Factors, Promotion, and Distribution

The Treemap analysis shows that the themes “Product” and ‘Consumers’ have dominant areas, followed by the themes “Evaluation,” “Distribution,” and “Quality.” This illustrates that successful differentiation depends not only on product quality, but also on the efficiency of the production process and the marketing strategy implemented. Promotion is still carried out in a simple manner, namely through word of mouth and local reseller networks. Although digital promotion has not been optimally utilized, this strategy has proven to be effective in reaching consumers in the surrounding area. In the future, the use of social media and digital platforms is expected to increase market reach and strengthen the product's image among young consumers. In addition, the distribution aspect also plays an important role in maintaining product availability. Roti Dua Berkah Binjai relies on resellers as its main distribution channel, although there are still obstacles in the form of limited delivery fleets. This shows that increasing distribution capacity is a strategic step to support the sustainability of product differentiation in the future.

Product Innovation and Challenges Faced

Based on the results of the Text Search Query, the word “product” often appears in the context of discussions about innovation, taste, and packaging. Business actors admit that they have conducted trials (test batches) to introduce new flavors, but these are still in the limited development stage. Limited human resources and raw materials are the main factors limiting the speed of innovation. Nevertheless, efforts to maintain taste and quality remain a top priority. Consumers consider Roti Dua Berkah Binjai products to have a distinctive taste and affordable prices, making them competitive in the local market. This shows that innovation does not always have to take the form of new products, but can also be in the form of improved quality, service, and customer experience.

Another challenge that has arisen is the monotony of flavor variations and the simplicity of product packaging. However, it is precisely this simplicity that creates an authentic impression and has become a distinctive feature of this business. In line with Porter's theory (1985), competitive advantage is not only achieved through major innovations, but also through efficiency and added value that can differentiate products from competitors.

Strategy Integration Based on Project Map

Project Map analysis shows the relationship between various elements of differentiation strategy, including product quality, innovation, promotion, distribution, and business evaluation. The strategy of maintaining quality is carried out through monitoring raw materials and taste checking by the owner directly. Meanwhile, innovation is developed gradually through new flavor variants that are tested on a small scale. Promotion and product image still rely on strong personal relationships with customers and the role of resellers in expanding the market. In the future, this strategy needs to be strengthened with more intensive digital promotion in order to reach a wider range of consumers. Regular

evaluation of production is also an important step in maintaining efficiency and identifying operational obstacles. These findings reinforce the views of Kotler & Keller (2016) and Porter (1985) that effective differentiation requires integration between product quality, continuous innovation, and a deep understanding of consumer needs. Roti Dua Berkah Binjai has demonstrated the application of this principle through consistent and focused strategies despite limited resources.

Effectiveness of Strategies in Enhancing Competitive Advantage

Overall, the results of the study show that the product differentiation strategy implemented by Roti Dua Berkah Binjai is effective in enhancing competitive advantage. This effectiveness is reflected in the company's ability to maintain customer loyalty, uphold quality, and gain positive perceptions from consumers. Consistency in taste and affordability are the main strengths that differentiate this product from its competitors in the local market. However, in order for competitive advantage to be sustainable, improvements are needed in the areas of innovation and digital marketing. Innovation in flavor variety, packaging design, and the use of social media as a modern promotional tool can expand market reach and strengthen the brand's position amid increasingly fierce competition. Thus, a differentiation strategy focused on quality, consistency, and customer satisfaction has proven capable of adding value and creating a competitive advantage for Roti Dua Berkah Binjai. This success demonstrates that differentiation is not only about physical product differences but also about building customer experience and trust in a sustainable manner.

The Islamic Economic Perspective in Product Differentiation Strategy

When analyzed from an Islamic economic perspective, the product differentiation strategy implemented by Roti Dua Berkah Binjai not only reflects business efforts to increase competitiveness but also demonstrates the implementation of Islamic business ethics values. The principles of honesty (*sidq*), trustworthiness (*amanah*), and benevolence (*ihsan*) are reflected in the business's efforts to maintain taste quality, product consistency, and provide affordable prices for consumers. This is in line with the concept of Islamic economics, which emphasizes that business activities must benefit society and be carried out in a fair and responsible manner.

In addition, the application of the principles of *halal* and *thayyib* in the food production process is an added value that can increase consumer confidence. In the food industry, *halal* certification is not only a religious obligation but also an important factor in building customer loyalty. Consumers tend to choose products that not only have good quality but are also produced in accordance with *sharia* values. Therefore, a differentiation strategy that integrates Islamic economic values can strengthen the competitive position of a business while creating a more trustworthy image in the eyes of the public.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that the product differentiation strategy implemented by Roti Dua Berkah Binjai plays an important role in enhancing the

competitive advantage of the business. This advantage is mainly reflected in the consistency of taste quality, affordable prices, and the relationship of trust that has been built between the business and consumers. In addition, the application of Islamic economic values such as honesty, trustworthiness, and the principles of halal and thayyib in the production process also strengthens the positive image of the business in the eyes of consumers. However, this business still faces several limitations, such as a lack of product innovation, suboptimal use of digital marketing, and obstacles in the distribution system. Therefore, efforts are needed to develop product innovation, strengthen digital branding strategies, and consistently apply Islamic economic principles so that the business can improve its competitiveness in a sustainable manner and expand its market share in the future.

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