



**THE EFFECT OF COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE STRATEGY ON THE
COMPETITIVENESS OF CRACKER MSMEs IN TLASIH VILLAGE,
TULANGAN DISTRICT, SIDOARJO REGENCY**

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Email: lestarife@uwks.ac.id**Abstract**

This study aims to analyze the influence of low-cost strategies, differentiation strategies, and focus strategies on the competitiveness of cracker MSMEs in Tlasih Village, Tulangan District, Sidoarjo Regency. The study used a quantitative approach with multiple linear regression. The study population consisted of 40 cracker MSMEs, while the sample selection used purposive sampling based on the criteria of businesses having a formal organization in decision-making. The low-cost strategy variable was measured through production cost efficiency, raw material control, production scale, and competitive prices; the differentiation strategy variable through innovation, quality, packaging, and brand image; the focus strategy variable through segmentation, specialization, and special services; while the competitiveness variable through sales, market share, customer loyalty, and business sustainability. The regression results showed R of 0.789 and R² of 0.622. The simultaneous test produced F (3,12) = 6.593 with p = 0.00699, so that the three strategies together had a significant effect on competitiveness. However, partial testing showed that low-cost, differentiation, and focus strategies were not yet significant at the 5 percent level. These findings suggest that MSME competitiveness is better understood as the result of a complementary strategic configuration rather than a single strategy. The research implications emphasize the integration of cost efficiency, value differentiation, market segmentation, and simple digitalization as the basis for strengthening the competitiveness of Tlasih Village's cracker MSMEs.

Keywords: low cost strategy; differentiation; focus strategy; competitiveness; MSMEs; cracker industry.

Introduction

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are an important part of the regional economic structure because they function as a source of income, job creation, and driving community-based economic activity. In the context of processed food businesses, the characteristics of MSMEs are greatly influenced by the owner's ability to manage costs, maintain quality, read changes in demand, and build relationships with customers. Strategic management literature positions competitive advantage as an organization's ability to create better value than competitors through consistent resource configuration and competitive positioning.[1] This view is relevant to the cracker industry in Tlasih Village, Tulangan District, Sidoarjo Regency, because the cracker business faces competitors who offer similar products and consumers who can relatively easily compare prices, quality, taste, and packaging.

The research document shows that the cracker industry in Tlasih Village is growing and has economic significance for the local community, but faces increasing

competition. Internal challenges include limited capital, production capacity, and human resource quality, while external challenges include raw materials, changing consumer tastes, developments in production technology, and substitute products. These conditions require business actors to have a clear strategic position and be able to translate internal conditions into operational business decisions. From a strategic management perspective, strategy does not stop at determining objectives, but includes choosing how the company creates value, allocates resources, and maintains its position against competitors.[2]

This research is based on three competitive strategy options used in the basic document: low-cost strategy, differentiation strategy, and focus strategy. A low-cost strategy emphasizes process efficiency and cost control so that companies can offer competitive prices. A differentiation strategy emphasizes product uniqueness through taste, quality, packaging, or brand image. Meanwhile, a focus strategy is directed at a specific market segment so that companies can serve the needs of a more specific customer group. These three approaches are essentially different ways of building value, and their relevance for MSMEs depends on the resources and characteristics of the market being served. [3]

Recent empirical studies have shown that generic strategies are still relevant for MSMEs, but their impact is not always uniform. Anwar et al. found that differentiation and cost leadership strategies can improve both financial and non-financial performance of MSMEs, while research in the manufacturing sector shows that cost leadership is more effective when accompanied by quality and on-time delivery. [4,5] On the other hand, research on small businesses in Indonesia shows that competitive advantage is related to strategic orientation, innovation, networks, technology, and the ability to understand customers. [6] These differences in findings indicate the importance of testing competitive strategies in specific local contexts, including the cracker MSMEs of Tlasi Village.

Based on the initial research document, the population of cracker MSMEs in Tlasi Village amounted to 40 business units and the sample selection was carried out purposively with the consideration that the business has a formal organization in decision making. The variables tested were low-cost strategy (X1), differentiation strategy (X2), focus strategy (X3), and MSME competitiveness (Y). Low-cost indicators include production cost efficiency, raw material control, production scale, and competitive selling prices; differentiation includes product/taste innovation, quality, design/packaging, and brand image; focus strategy includes market segmentation, product specialization, and special services; while competitiveness includes increased sales, market share, customer loyalty, and business sustainability. [7]

The purpose of this study is to analyze the influence of these three strategies on the competitiveness of cracker MSMEs in Tlasi Village and formulate managerial implications based on the results of multiple linear regression. The study contributes in two ways. First, academically, it tests generic strategies in the context of a home-based food industry facing resource constraints. Second, practically, the research results are used to determine more realistic strategic priorities for MSMEs so that business development is not solely focused on low prices but also considers market segmentation, quality, and sustainability.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Competitive advantage in this study is understood as the ability of MSMEs to maintain and improve their market position through better value compared to competitors. In the resource-based view approach, sustainable advantage does not only come from market conditions, but from resources and capabilities that are valuable, difficult to imitate, and can be combined effectively in strategy. [8] For MSMEs, these resources can be in the form of owner knowledge, recipes, workforce skills, supplier relationships, product reputation, loyal customers, and the ability to organize production processes. Because MSME resources are relatively limited, the choice of strategy needs to consider the real capabilities of the business so that the formulated strategy can be implemented consistently.

A low-cost strategy is an approach that places efficiency as the primary source of value. Efficiency can be achieved through raw material control, waste reduction, production capacity utilization, process standardization, and distribution cost control. For cracker MSMEs, a low-cost strategy is not synonymous with lowering quality. In fact, controlled costs allow prices to remain competitive while maintaining margins. Research by Simamora and Sulistianingsih shows that a cost leadership strategy influences the competitive advantage of coffee shop MSMEs, while other research on batik MSMEs indicates that cost and differentiation strategies are important mechanisms in the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and performance. [9,10]

Differentiation strategy focuses on creating attributes that customers perceive as valuable. In modern marketing, differentiation can be built through product, quality, design, branding, customer experience, and value communication. [11] In the cracker industry, differentiation can be realized through distinctive flavors, consistent crispiness, size variations, packaging design, brand identity, informative labels, and product storytelling. However, differentiation only becomes a source of advantage if customers consider these differences important and are willing to maintain their preferences. Thus, innovation carried out by MSMEs needs to be based on market needs, not solely on the desires of producers.

A focus strategy directs resources to narrower and more specific segments. For MSMEs with limited resources, focus can be a rational choice because the company does not have to serve the entire market. Segments can be distinguished based on region, consumer type, sales channel, packaging size, price level, or special needs. Literature on the strategic position of MSMEs emphasizes that the choice of strategy needs to be adjusted to the market size and the sources of competitive advantage that the company possesses. [12] In the context of Tlasi Village, focus can be directed at wholesale customers, souvenir shops, traditional markets, stalls, resellers, or household consumers in a particular area.

The marketing perspective reinforces the argument that competitive strategy needs to be linked to the creation of customer value. Kotler, Keller, and Chernev emphasize the importance of segmentation, market targeting, positioning, product management, branding, pricing, and customer relationships in building value. [13] This means that focus and differentiation strategies cannot stand alone without an understanding of who the primary customers are, what benefits they seek, and why customers choose certain products. In MSMEs, this understanding can be obtained

through direct interaction with customers, sales records, reseller feedback, and competitor observation.

Based on the above description, this study develops three hypotheses. H1 states that a low-cost strategy has a positive effect on the competitiveness of cracker MSMEs. H2 states that a differentiation strategy has a positive effect on the competitiveness of MSMEs. H3 states that a focus strategy has a positive effect on the competitiveness of MSMEs. Simultaneously, H4 states that low-cost, differentiation, and focus strategies jointly influence the competitiveness of MSMEs. Hypothesis development is based on the assumption that competitiveness is the result of strategic positioning choices that are translated into operational and marketing activities.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design to examine the relationship between competitive strategy and the competitiveness of MSMEs. The unit of analysis is cracker MSMEs in Tlasi Village, Tulangan District, Sidoarjo Regency. The baseline document lists a population of 40 MSMEs and uses purposive sampling with the criteria of businesses having a formal organization for decision-making. Data collection was conducted through interviews and questionnaires containing questions related to the internal and external conditions of the business. [14]

The independent variables consist of low-cost strategy (X1), differentiation strategy (X2), and focus strategy (X3), while the dependent variable is MSME competitiveness (Y). The low-cost strategy is measured through production cost efficiency, raw material cost control, production scale, and competitive selling prices. The differentiation strategy is measured through product/taste innovation, product quality, design/packaging, and brand image. The focus strategy is measured through market segmentation, product specialization, and special services. Competitiveness is measured through increased sales, market share, customer loyalty, and business sustainability. The structure of these indicators is maintained from the basic document so that the interpretation of the regression results remains consistent with the research instrument. [15]

Table 1. Operationalization of Variables

Variables	Indicator	Code
Low Cost Strategy (X1)	Production cost efficiency; raw material control; production scale; competitive selling price	X1.1-X1.4
Differentiation Strategy (X2)	Product innovation/taste; quality; design/packaging; brand image	X2.1-X2.4
Focus Strategy (X3)	Market segmentation; product specialization; specialized services	X3.1-X3.3
Competitiveness (Y)	Increased sales; market share; customer loyalty; business sustainability	Y1-Y4

Data analysis used multiple linear regression. The conceptual model of the study can be written as $Y = f(X_1, X_2, X_3)$, with Y as competitiveness and X_1, X_2, X_3 as three competitive strategies. Tests were conducted on the model's ability to explain variations in competitiveness, simultaneous significance through the F test, and partial significance through the t test. The regression output analyzed in the study was 16 observations.

Data analysis

Based on data analysis, it shows that the three predictors, the model correlation coefficient $R = 0.789$, $R^2 = 0.622$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.528$, and the standard error of estimate is 0.296. The model is simultaneously significant with $F(3,12) = 6.593$ and $p = 0.00699$.

Table 2. Summary of Multiple Linear Regression Results

Statistics	Mark	Interpretation
R	0.789	The combined relationship is relatively strong
R Square	0.622	62.24% of the variation in competitiveness is explained by the model
Adjusted R Square	0.528	52.80% after correction for the number of predictors and samples
Standard Error of Estimate	0.296	Model estimation error
$F(3,12)$	6,593	Significant simultaneous model
Sig. F	0.00699	< 0.05; H4 is accepted

Because the available regression output displays correlation statistics in the coefficients table, the interpretation of partial effects in this study uses the available zero-order correlation, partial correlation, and part correlation. The partial correlation value for the low-cost strategy is 0.327, the differentiation strategy is -0.048, and the focus strategy is 0.193. With a residual degree of freedom of 12, these values are equivalent to t-statistics of approximately 1.198; -0.167; and 0.681, respectively, with two-tailed significance values of approximately 0.254; 0.870; and 0.509. Thus, at the 5 percent level, there is insufficient statistical evidence to state that each strategy has a partial significant effect on competitiveness. However, all three strategies together have a significant effect on competitiveness. This interpretation is important because it avoids claiming that one variable is individually significant when the output does not support that claim.

Table 3. Interpretation of Partial Effect Based on Partial Correlation

Predictor	Zero-order	Partial	Part	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Low Cost (X_1)	0.780	0.327	0.213	1,198	0.254
Differentiation (X_2)	0.727	-0.048	-0.030	-0.167	0.870

Focus (X3)	0.736	0.193	0.121	0.681	0.509
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Research result

The regression results show that the model incorporating low-cost, differentiation, and focus strategies has a fairly strong relationship with MSME competitiveness. The R value of 0.789 indicates a relatively strong combined relationship between the three strategies and competitiveness. The R² value of 0.622 means that approximately 62.24 percent of the variation in competitiveness in the sample can be jointly explained by the three analyzed strategies. Meanwhile, the adjusted R² of 0.528 indicates that after considering the number of predictors and sample size, the explanatory power of the corrected model is approximately 52.80 percent. The remainder is explained by factors outside the research model.

The simultaneous test yielded an F of 6.593 with a p-value of 0.00699. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the simultaneous hypothesis is accepted. Thus, low-cost, differentiation, and focus strategies simultaneously have a significant relationship with the competitiveness of the Tlasi Village cracker MSME. This finding indicates that competitiveness is not appropriately understood as a consequence of only one strategic choice. In the context of MSMEs, various activities such as production efficiency, quality, packaging, segment selection, service, and customer management can work together to shape a competitive position.

In partial testing, the low-cost strategy had a zero-order correlation of 0.780 and a partial correlation of 0.327. The direction of the relationship remained positive after the influence of other variables was controlled, but its strength became smaller. The t-estimate was approximately 1.198 and p-value was approximately 0.254, so the partial effect was not yet significant at the 5 percent level. These results do not mean that cost efficiency is unimportant for MSMEs, but rather indicate that in a small sample size there is not yet sufficient statistical evidence that changes in low-cost strategy are uniquely able to explain changes in competitiveness after other strategies are taken into account.

The differentiation strategy has a zero-order correlation of 0.727, but the partial correlation is -0.048. The t-value is equivalent to approximately -0.167, with a p-value of approximately 0.870. This change in direction from a simple positive relationship to a very small, negative partial relationship suggests the possibility of information overlap with other strategies in the model. In other words, MSMEs with more differentiated products do not necessarily have a uniquely higher competitive advantage once low costs and market focus are accounted for. This finding should be read with caution because the sample size is only 16 observations and complete information on unstandardized regression coefficients and multicollinearity tests is not available.

The focus strategy has a zero-order correlation of 0.736 and a partial correlation of 0.193. The t-value is approximately 0.681, with a p-value of approximately 0.509. The direction of the relationship remains positive, but not yet significant. This means that market concentration in certain segments has the potential to support competitiveness, but the available statistical evidence is insufficient to establish a strong unique effect. The partial correlation value of 0.121 also indicates a relatively small unique contribution to the variation in competitiveness after other variables are accounted for.

Looking at the part correlation, the unique contribution of the low-cost strategy to R^2 can be approximated through the squared part correlation, which is approximately 4.52 percent; the differentiation strategy is approximately 0.09 percent; and the focus strategy is approximately 1.46 percent. These three figures should not be summed as the overall effect of the model because R^2 also includes the variation jointly explained by the predictors. These results actually show that much of the model's ability to explain competitiveness comes from the combination or intersection of strategies. For MSMEs, the implication is that efficiency, differentiation, and focus should be viewed as a complementary package of activities, rather than three entirely separate options.

Discussion

The main finding of the study is that all three competitive strategies are simultaneously significantly related to competitiveness, but none of them shows a significant partial effect at the 5 percent level. This pattern is interesting because the zero-order relationships of the three strategies with competitiveness are all positive and relatively high, whereas after the influence of other strategies is controlled, the relationship becomes much smaller. Substantively, this can be read as an indication that cracker MSMEs do not build competitiveness through a single activity. Cost efficiency, product uniqueness, and market focus can work together in the value creation process. The literature on small businesses shows that effective strategies are increasingly related to the ability to combine resources, customer orientation, innovation, networks, and technology. [16]

The findings regarding low-cost strategies align with the view that cost control is a crucial foundation for businesses with limited margins. In the cracker industry, raw materials, oil, energy, labor, packaging, and distribution are components that directly impact costs. If MSMEs are able to control raw material purchases, reduce product defects, improve capacity utilization, and regulate production batch sizes, prices can be maintained competitively. Simamora and Sulistianingsih's research also found that cost leadership influences competitive advantage in MSMEs, while research on manufacturing strategies shows that cost leadership is more effective when translated into quality and on-time delivery. [17,18]

However, the insignificant partial results warn that a low-cost strategy alone is not enough. If all producers offer crackers at nearly the same price, cost efficiency is no longer a strong differentiator. Under such conditions, the benefits of efficiency may only maintain sustainable margins, not automatically increase market share. For Tlasi Village's MSMEs, a low-cost strategy should be directed at internal efficiencies that do not sacrifice quality. Savings that compromise ingredient quality, taste, cleanliness, or product consistency can actually weaken competitiveness in the long run.

The differentiation findings need to be read more critically. Simply put, differentiation has a positive relationship with competitiveness, but after controlling for other strategies, the correlation is almost zero and slightly negative. One possible explanation is that innovations in flavor, quality, packaging, and branding in cracker MSMEs are not yet strong enough to become a source of unique advantage. If competing products also implement similar innovations, differentiation becomes easily imitated. Marketing literature emphasizes that differentiation must generate

clear customer value and easily recognizable positioning, not simply add product attributes. [19,20]

This situation demonstrates the importance of shifting the concept of differentiation from mere product variety to valuable and difficult-to-imitate differentiation. For example, MSMEs can develop the Tlasi brand identity, maintain crispiness standards, use safer and more informative packaging, provide sizes tailored to resellers' needs, or build a narrative about the production process. Differentiation can also be service-based, such as speed of order fulfillment, consistency of supply, flexibility of order quantities, and responsiveness to complaints. Within this framework, excellence lies not only in the cracker itself, but in the overall customer experience.

Focus strategy also has a simple positive relationship and remains positive after other variables are controlled, although it is not yet significant. This makes sense for MSMEs because resource constraints make it easier for companies to compete in a specific segment rather than trying to serve the entire market. Focusing on wholesale customers, resellers, souvenir shops, or a specific marketing area can allow for more concentrated promotional and distribution resources. Research on the strategic positioning of MSMEs in developing countries also shows the importance of a fit between the source of advantage and the chosen market coverage. [21]

Significant simultaneous results also support the approach that strategy needs to be viewed as a system. David, David, and David explain that strategic management encompasses the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of strategy, so that strategic choices must be translated into coordinated actions.[22] In Tlasi's context, low costs can support pricing, differentiation increases perceived value, and focus ensures resources are directed to the most profitable customers. This combination can produce a stronger position than the partial implementation of any one strategy.

Recent research on Indonesian MSMEs also reinforces the importance of an integrated strategic orientation. Yang et al. found that strategic orientation positively influences MSME economic sustainability and that competitive advantage extends this influence; innovation, networks, and technological orientation are important factors in shaping sustainability.[23] These findings are relevant for cracker MSMEs because competitiveness is determined not only by price and product, but also by the ability to access market information, utilize technology, build reseller networks, and update marketing methods.

Managerial Implications

First, the Tlasi Village cracker MSME needs to make cost efficiency a foundation for its operations. Practical priorities include recording costs per batch, controlling raw material usage, standardizing measurements, reducing product defects, managing production schedules, and evaluating distribution costs. Efficiency needs to be measured regularly so that owners know the actual unit cost and margins. Good cost control will allow businesses to set competitive prices without sacrificing profits.

Second, differentiation needs to be directed at attributes that customers truly value. Business owners can conduct simple tests on taste, size, packaging, labeling, and branding by soliciting customer or reseller feedback. New products should not

be immediately produced on a large scale before they are known to be acceptable. This approach reduces the risk of innovation that does not add value. In marketing, superiority is determined not only by the number of variants, but by the ability to choose a clear value proposition.[24]

Third, a focus strategy can be implemented through customer segmentation. MSMEs can group customers based on purchase volume, order frequency, location, margins, and service needs. The most profitable segments are then given special services, such as priority stock, specific package sizes, delivery schedules, or volume-based pricing. This strategy can increase loyalty and reduce waste of marketing resources.

Fourth, all three strategies need to be integrated with simple digitalization. Using WhatsApp Business, digital catalogs, customer records, local marketplaces, and social media can strengthen promotions while simplifying demand monitoring. Small business literature shows that digital technology can help small businesses combine efficiency and differentiation, so companies don't have to choose one over the other.[25] For Tlasi's MSMEs, digitalization should start from the real needs and capabilities of users, rather than simply following trends.

Fifth, MSME managers need to develop strategic performance indicators. Cost indicators can include production costs per kilogram or per package and the rate of product defects; differentiation indicators can include the proportion of new product sales, repeat orders, and complaint rates; focus indicators can include sales per segment, number of active customers, and repeat purchase frequency. Competitiveness indicators can include sales growth, active customers, market share in the target region, and business sustainability. Regular measurement will help owners evaluate their strategies more objectively.

Conclusion

This study shows that low-cost, differentiation, and focus strategies simultaneously have a significant effect on the competitiveness of cracker MSMEs in Tlasi Village. The regression model produces $R = 0.789$ and $R^2 = 0.622$, while the simultaneous test produces $F[3,12] = 6.593$ with $p = 0.00699$. This means that approximately 62.24 percent of the variation in competitiveness in the sample can be explained jointly by the three strategies. However, partial testing shows that low-cost, differentiation, and focus strategies are not yet significant individually at the 5 percent level. The direction of the partial relationship is positive, very weakly negative, and positive, respectively.

The substantive conclusion is that the competitiveness of cracker MSMEs is better understood as the result of a strategic configuration rather than a single strategy in isolation. Cost efficiency is crucial for maintaining prices and margins, differentiation is crucial for creating value, and focus helps direct resources to the most relevant segments. Therefore, the recommended strategy is not to choose one approach exclusively, but rather to develop a combination that suits the MSME's resources and market.

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