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Branding Strategies of Home-Based Tempeh Businesses and Consumer Trust amid Changes in the Social Environment

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Abstract

Background: Home-based tempeh businesses rely on local reputation and product consistency to maintain consumer trust. Changing consumer preferences and the growing use of digital channels are reshaping how these businesses communicate their identity.
Objective: This study examined how home-based tempeh businesses adapted their branding to changes in the social environment and how participants related these practices to consumer trust.
Methods: A qualitative multiple-case study examined 12 purposively selected home-based tempeh businesses in Badung, Bali, from September 2024 to January 2025. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with business operators, 24 consumers, and six key informants, supplemented by observations and document analysis. Thematic analysis identified recurring patterns and differences across cases.
Results: Businesses communicated family heritage and local identity, engaged customers through community networks and digital channels, maintained product quality, and adapted to changing preferences. Participant accounts linked consumer trust to consistent quality, honest communication, and responsiveness. These findings informed the proposed AKSI framework, comprising Authenticity, *Komunitas* (community), System, and Innovation.
Conclusion: The AKSI framework explains how the branding practices identified in these cases may support consumer trust. Its applicability in other settings and the relative effectiveness of its dimensions require further evaluation.

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INTRODUCTION

Tempeh, a fermented soybean food, is part of Indonesia's culinary heritage and provides a source of livelihood for home-based producers (Romulo & Surya, 2021). Its familiarity as an everyday food gives producers a recognizable product category, yet individual businesses still need to communicate what customers can expect from their tempeh. For enterprises that sell through neighborhood networks, markets, and small retailers, this identity may develop through repeated purchases and personal contact. As product information circulates through packaging and digital channels, producers also face the task of communicating their identity to customers who have limited prior knowledge of the business.

This issue is relevant to home-based producers whose operations leave limited resources for branding. Putri et al. (2025) identified workforce development and financial management as priorities in a study of tempeh business development. Within a small enterprise, branding decisions compete for time and resources with production, distribution, and routine customer service. Packaging can carry the producer's name and product information, while personal recommendations can communicate a business's reputation at little direct cost. Digital channels

offer additional ways to present the product, explain production practices, and answer questions. How businesses combine these practices depends partly on their resources and the customers they seek to reach.

The 12 home-based tempeh businesses examined in Badung, Bali, provide a local setting for exploring this variation. Their practices included the use of family identity, branded packaging, community relationships, and digital communication in different combinations. Some relied primarily on word of mouth, while others used social media alongside established sales channels. These differences raise a practical question about how customers come to recognize and assess a producer when they encounter information through different channels. For regular customers, repeated purchases may provide a basis for assessing consistency. For prospective buyers, packaging, recommendations, and online content may shape their initial expectations.

The customer-based brand equity (CBBE) framework explains why these points of contact matter. Keller (2016) locates brand equity in the knowledge and associations that shape how consumers respond to a brand. For a home-based tempeh business, those associations can include the producer's name, perceptions of freshness, familiarity with a family's production methods, and previous interactions with the seller. A visual identifier helps customers recognize a product, while their experiences give meaning to that identifier over time. CBBE therefore provides a lens for examining how producers communicate their identity and how consumers interpret that identity in light of what they already know about the business.

The cultural meaning of tempeh adds another dimension to brand identity. Anwar et al. (2023) examined perceptions of tempeh as Indonesian cultural heritage across generations. A review by Septiani et al. (2024) identified social identity, brand management, and country of origin among the perspectives used to explain intentions to buy local brands. For tempeh producers, family stories and references to local craftsmanship can help convey the origins and continuity of a business. Whether these associations matter to individual buyers depends on how they interpret such cues alongside other considerations, including product quality, accessibility, and familiarity with the producer.

Consumer trust adds a distinct question about what buyers expect from a business. Khamitov et al. (2024) synthesize research linking trust to judgments about an entity's reliability and integrity. In home-based tempeh production, reliability can be examined through consumers' accounts of whether the product consistently meets expectations for texture, freshness, or other qualities they value. Integrity can be examined through how consumers describe a producer's honesty about raw materials, production difficulties, or complaints. A buyer may therefore draw on both the product experience and the producer's conduct when deciding whether to trust the business. This distinction helps connect branding practices to specific aspects of consumer trust.

The Resource-Based View (RBV) and social capital theory complement CBBE by directing attention to the conditions under which brand meaning develops. RBV helps examine what producers draw on when communicating a distinctive identity, including accumulated production experience, family knowledge, and ties to local markets (Barney et al., 2021). Social capital theory directs attention to relationships through which information and reputations circulate, including connections among business operators, market traders, and regular customers (Kraima, 2023). Taken together, the three perspectives connect the resources available to producers, the networks through which customers encounter the business, and the meanings customers attach to the product and its producer.

The changing social environment gives these processes practical relevance. Consumers can encounter a producer through a neighbor's recommendation, a package at a market stall, or a social media post. Each route makes different information available about the producer and its practices. Community contacts may share experiences accumulated over several purchases, while digital content can make aspects of production visible before a first purchase. Interest in local products, health, and sustainability may also influence which information consumers seek. This study treats these developments as conditions that participants describe when explaining their branding choices and judgments about trust.

Prior reviews of tempeh research map work on production, product characteristics, applications, and development opportunities (Hartati et al., 2025; Hasniah et al., 2025). Research on branding in small and medium-sized enterprises addresses broader questions of brand development and management across business settings (Odoom et al., 2017). Less is understood

about how home-based tempeh producers combine family or local identity, community relationships, quality practices, and digital communication as customer expectations change. The study addresses this gap by comparing how branding is practiced across businesses and examining how business operators and consumers relate those practices to trust in a traditional food market.

Accordingly, this study aims to identify the branding practices of home-based tempeh businesses, examine how business operators and consumers relate those practices to consumer trust, and explore how changes in the social environment inform branding decisions. It also develops a context-sensitive conceptual framework from recurring themes across the 12 cases. Its contribution lies in showing how production resources, relationships, and consumer interpretations can be considered together when examining branding in home-based food enterprises. The framework can inform discussions among producers and enterprise support organizations about which practices fit particular market conditions and customer relationships.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative multiple-case design to examine how home-based tempeh businesses develop and communicate their brands and how business operators and consumers relate these practices to consumer trust. Each of the 12 businesses constituted a case. The analysis first considered branding within each business context and then compared recurring practices and differences across cases, consistent with a multiple-case approach (Harrison et al., 2017). The cases were located in Badung, Bali. Because descriptions of the administrative sublocations were inconsistent in the study records, the analysis used Badung as the geographic reference and did not classify the businesses by urban or rural setting.

The 12 businesses were selected purposively based on years in operation, business scale, variation in branding practices, and location. The sample included nine microenterprises and three small enterprises, with operating histories ranging from three to 28 years. In addition to business operators, the study interviewed 24 consumers and six key informants. The key informants included micro, small, and medium enterprise (MSME) coaches, academics, and food-marketing practitioners. Consumer accounts provided perspectives on how buyers understood branding practices, while key informants offered context on small-business development and food marketing. The study records do not specify the number of individual business operators interviewed or the detailed procedures used to recruit interview participants.

Table 1
Business unit profiles and informants

Characteristics of Informants	Details
Number of tempeh business units	12 units in Badung, Bali; administrative sublocations are not consistently specified
Years in operation	3 – 28 years (average 12.4 years)
Scale of the business	9 micro businesses, 3 small businesses
Consumers interviewed	24 people (age range 22–58 years)
Key informants	6 people (MSME coaches, academics, practitioners)
Data collection period	September 2024 – January 2025

Data were collected from September 2024 to January 2025 through semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and examination of business materials. Interviews covered business history, branding practices, perceptions of consumer trust, changes in the social environment, and challenges encountered by home-based producers. Observations focused on production and distribution, providing context for participants' descriptions of day-to-day operations. The materials examined included packaging, promotional materials, social media accounts, and relevant business documents. These sources provided examples of how businesses presented their products through physical and digital channels. The study records do not specify interview duration, recording and transcription procedures, or the researcher's precise role during observation.

Thematic analysis proceeded through familiarization with the data, coding, theme development and review, definition, and reporting (Nowell et al., 2017). Within-case analysis

examined how branding practices were described and documented in the context of each business. Cross-case comparison then considered how patterns of brand identity, community and digital communication, product quality, and adaptation recurred or differed across the 12 businesses. These patterns informed the development of the proposed AKSI conceptual framework. The study reports using source and method triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing to support the credibility of the interpretations. The available records do not detail when these procedures took place, who participated, or what changes resulted from them.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Profile of Homemade Tempeh Business at the Research Location

The 12 case businesses varied in generation of management, production scale, market reach, and technology adoption. Eight were described as family businesses spanning at least two generations. Reported soybean processing ranged from 20 to 150 kg per day, and sales channels included neighborhood delivery, markets, stalls, and restaurants. These are descriptive case characteristics, not estimates for the broader sector.

The cases were grouped descriptively by branding orientation: five traditional-communal businesses relied on community reputation and word of mouth; five transitional-adaptive businesses reported partial use of branded packaging or social media; and two contemporary-digital businesses combined brand identity, packaging, and active digital communication. The categories describe observed practices rather than a scored ranking of trust.

Table 2 summarizes these orientations. The grouping reflects the branding practices reported and observed during the study period and should not be read as a fixed classification, because a business could move between orientations as it adopted new packaging or channels. The transitional-adaptive group, for example, included businesses that had begun to use branded packaging or social media while continuing to rely on regular customers and market traders for most of their sales. The range of reported processing volumes, from 20 to 150 kg of soybeans per day, also indicates that the time and resources available for branding differed considerably across the cases. Studies of home-based tempeh industries similarly treat value added and marketing performance as related but distinct aspects of business development (Anti et al., 2026).

Table 2

Branding orientations observed across the 12 case businesses

Branding orientation	Observed branding practices
Traditional-communal (5 businesses)	Reliance on community reputation, word of mouth, regular customers, and market relationships; limited formal branding
Transitional-adaptive (5 businesses)	Partial use of branded packaging or social media alongside established local sales channels
Contemporary-digital (2 businesses)	Combined brand identity, branded packaging, family narratives, and active digital communication

Applied Branding Strategy

Brand Identity Building Based on Local Wisdom

Several businesses linked brand identity to local or family histories and production practices. Two cases in the contemporary-digital group used family references in their names and narratives. These accounts illustrate how business actors communicated authenticity; the available consumer evidence does not establish that this strategy produced the greatest trust.

As expressed by one of the informants: "Our brand uses the name of the late grandfather, the founder of this business 35 years ago. We want consumers to know that our tempe is not just a product, but a family heritage that we take care of wholeheartedly." This expression reflects that for some home-made tempeh business actors, branding is not a foreign concept imposed from outside, but a natural expression of the values they have practiced for a long time. This finding is in line with the view of Nunes et al. (2021) that authenticity is assessed by consumers through a number of component assessments, including connectedness and integrity, so that the disclosure of the family heritage can be understood as an effort to build an authentic assessment in the minds of consumers.

Brand identity was also expressed through tangible cues. In the cases that used branded packaging, the producer's name and product information allowed customers to recognize the tempeh outside the producer's immediate neighborhood, for instance when it was sold through markets, stalls, or restaurants. For businesses in the traditional-communal group, which relied on reputation and word of mouth, identification was more likely to rest on personal familiarity with the producer than on a printed label. Both forms of identification allowed customers to link a product to a particular producer, but they depended on different conditions. A printed identity travels with the product, whereas personal familiarity depends on continued contact between the producer and the customer.

Strengthening Digital Marketing Communication and Community

Marketing communication differed across the cases. The traditional-communal group relied mainly on neighbors, market traders, and regular customers, whereas some transitional-adaptive and contemporary-digital businesses used WhatsApp, Instagram, or TikTok alongside local networks. The distinction concerns reported channels, not a statistically measured difference in performance.

One case used TikTok to show its production process, hygiene practices, selected soybeans, and fermentation. The business actor described audience interest and new customer contact. These accounts illustrate a potential trust-building use of transparent product information, but the study did not measure a causal effect of this content on sales (Tseng et al., 2022).

Across the cases, digital channels supplemented rather than replaced community networks. Businesses that used WhatsApp, Instagram, or TikTok continued to serve neighbors, market traders, and regular customers through their established routes. In this context, messaging applications can support ordering and direct conversation with customers who already know the producer, whereas visual platforms can present the product and its production to people who have not yet bought it. The combination resembles what Juntunen (2024) describes as brand co-creation in small and medium-sized enterprises, in which brand meaning develops through interactions between the firm and its stakeholders rather than through one-way promotion. For the traditional-communal businesses, comparable interaction took place in person: regular customers' recommendations to neighbors functioned as a form of brand communication that producers did not directly control.

Quality Consistency as a Foundation of Trust

All informants, both business actors and consumers, agreed that product quality consistency is the most important foundation of consumer trust in homemade tempeh brands. Unlike large companies that can rely on a standardized quality control system, homemade tempeh businesses rely on the experience, intuition, and personal commitment of business owners in maintaining product quality. This consistency includes both physical dimensions (texture, color, and aroma of tempeh) and food safety dimensions (cleanliness, production timeliness, and use of quality raw materials).

Interestingly, some informants revealed that quality consistency in the context of homemade tempeh also includes a more personal dimension, namely honesty and openness in communicating with customers. Some business actors proactively inform customers when they experience production problems or when the quality of the soybeans obtained is less than optimal in a certain period. This transparency practice, although it seems simple, has proven to be very effective in strengthening customer trust who actually appreciate the honesty of business actors even more. This is in line with the findings of Khamitov et al. (2024) meta-analysis that integrity-based trust antecedents are more effective in encouraging consumer trust than reliability-based antecedents.

The accounts also indicate why quality consistency was demanding for home-based producers. Tempeh is a fermented product, and its texture, color, and aroma depend on the raw materials and the fermentation process. Variation in soybean quality, which some operators mentioned, could therefore affect the product that customers received. Because quality control relied on the owners' experience rather than on formal systems, maintaining consistency required close personal attention to daily production. For customers, each purchase offered an opportunity

to confirm or revise their expectations of a producer. The link between consistency and trust was thus formed through repeated transactions rather than through a single promotional message.

The Influence of Branding on Consumer Trust

Data analysis shows a clear relationship between the level of sophistication of the branding strategy and the level of consumer trust that is built. Efforts in the contemporary-digital typology show a distinct pattern of reported consumer trust, followed by transitional-adaptive typologies, and then traditional-communal typologies. Nevertheless, a rather surprising finding is that some efforts in traditional-communal typologies also managed to build very high levels of trust among their local customer communities, albeit without meaningful formal branding efforts.

This phenomenon shows that consumer trust in the context of a home tempeh business can be built through two different paths: the formal-structured path through a deliberate and planned branding strategy, and the informal-organic path through the accumulation of positive experiences and long-term personal relationships with customers. These two paths are not mutually exclusive, and the most effective is when they are harmoniously integrated in one holistic branding approach.

The two paths differ in how customers obtain information about a producer. On the informal-organic path, information accumulates through personal experience and recommendations within a community, so trust tends to be concentrated among customers who are already connected to the producer. On the formal-structured path, packaging and digital content make information available to customers without prior contact, which can widen the range of potential buyers but places greater weight on whether the product matches what is communicated. These observations are interpretations of participants' accounts across a small number of cases; they indicate possible mechanisms rather than measured differences in trust levels.

Table 3

The dimensions of consumer trust and the most influential branding factors

Dimensions of Consumer Trust	Branding factors associated with consumer trust
Product reliability	Consistency of quality and transparency of raw materials
Manufacturer competence	Brand story & narrative of traditional craftsmanship
Brand integrity	Honesty, communication and complaint handling
Concern for consumers	Responsiveness on social media & personal service
Shared values	Branding based on local wisdom & sustainability

Consumer interviews were organized into five trust dimensions summarized in Table 3. The themes show that participants attended to several aspects of home-based tempeh brands; the analysis did not assign weights or establish that any one branding factor was the most influential.

The dimensions in Table 3 overlap in practice. Product reliability was discussed in relation to whether the tempeh consistently met customers' expectations, whereas brand integrity concerned how producers communicated about raw materials, production problems, and complaints. Manufacturer competence was associated with narratives of traditional craftsmanship, and concern for consumers with responsiveness through personal service and social media. Shared values connected branding to local wisdom and sustainability, although sustainability was explicitly mentioned by only one business. This set of dimensions is broadly comparable to multidimensional conceptualizations of trust on social media Mičík et al. (2022) in this study, however, the dimensions emerged from interviews about a traditional food product sold through both personal and digital channels.

Discussion

The Role of Social Environment in Branding Dynamics

Interview accounts from 12 home-based tempeh businesses in Badung, Bali, indicate that branding decisions were made in response to several changes in the social environment. Participants referred to consumer interest in health, preferences for local products, sustainability concerns, and the growing use of digital channels to obtain product information. The cases differed in how they responded to these developments. Some producers emphasized family

histories and established customer relationships, while others added branded packaging or social media to their existing practices. These differences suggest that branding adaptation depended partly on how each business already communicated with customers and what resources it could devote to new channels.

Interest in locally made products provided a context in which producers could articulate the origins of their tempeh. Several businesses drew on family histories and traditional production practices to communicate a recognizable identity. In this setting, a family name or story can give consumers a point of reference for understanding who makes the product and what practices the business seeks to preserve. The "Proud of Made in Indonesia" campaign provides broader context for the visibility of local products. The case material documents producers' use of local identity and heritage, while leaving open whether the campaign influenced their decisions or whether consumers' responses varied according to national sentiment.

Health interests and sustainability concerns also surfaced in the interviews, although the evidence was more specific for some themes than for others. A producer can use branding to describe ingredients and production practices that customers may wish to understand before purchase. Such communication can be interpreted as an effort to make product information accessible. One of the 12 businesses explicitly mentioned sustainability in its brand communication. This example shows that sustainability entered the branding of a particular case, while its prevalence across other businesses and its relevance to consumer trust remain open questions. The study collected no carbon-footprint data or comparative measures of consumers' responses to environmental claims.

Digital communication gave some producers a way to reach beyond their established customer networks. Several cases used WhatsApp, Instagram, or TikTok alongside neighborhood relationships and word of mouth. In one case, the producer used TikTok to show aspects of tempeh production and hygiene and described receiving interest from prospective customers. This illustrates how digital content can give unfamiliar audiences access to information that regular customers may acquire through direct contact. It is consistent with Rajković et al. (2021) examination of social media as a channel for building trust among smaller businesses. The case evidence concerns reported engagement and inquiries, and the study did not measure changes in sales or repeat purchases attributable to digital communication.

The AKSI Model for Home-Based Tempeh Branding

The proposed AKSI model organizes the practices identified across the cases into four dimensions: Authenticity, *Komunitas*, System, and Innovation. Authenticity refers to the credible communication of a producer's history, local identity, and production practices. Family narratives and accounts of traditional craftsmanship can help customers understand the origins of a product. Their credibility can be assessed through the consistency between the producer's account and what customers encounter through purchases or direct interactions. For businesses that use family heritage in their branding, the narrative supplies a point of reference for those experiences. The cases do not establish that a heritage-based narrative produces greater trust than other forms of brand communication.

Komunitas, the Indonesian term for community, concerns the relationships businesses maintain through neighborhood networks, markets, regular customers, and online interaction. Established relationships can give customers repeated opportunities to observe product consistency, ask questions, or communicate concerns. Digital channels can extend these interactions to customers who have limited direct contact with the producer. This dimension also helps explain why an enterprise may have an identifiable reputation even when it makes limited use of formal packaging or digital promotion. Across the cases, community relationships and product communication could complement one another. The available evidence does not establish whether any particular channel generates more durable trust.

System concerns recurring practices that help a business maintain product quality and respond to customer concerns. Participants discussed quality through characteristics such as texture, color, and aroma, as well as aspects of production, including cleanliness and the selection of raw materials. Some operators described informing customers when production problems arose or when soybean quality varied. These accounts illustrate how the management of product variation can become visible to buyers through direct communication. A producer's response to a

complaint or production problem gives customers information about how the business handles a departure from their expectations. This dimension reflects production and customer-service practices documented in the cases.

Innovation refers to incremental changes in products or communication in response to changing customer needs and information habits. The introduction of branded packaging or the use of a digital platform can represent an adjustment in how an existing product is presented. A video showing a family's production methods may, for example, communicate a business's history, provide information about its practices, and allow prospective customers to ask questions. This illustrates how innovation can intersect with authenticity, system, and community within one activity. The dimensions can also be relevant in different combinations depending on the producer's objectives and established customer relationships.

The practical value of AKSI depends on the circumstances of each business. Producers with established local customers may already have opportunities for direct feedback and can consider how consistently they respond to it. Businesses reaching less familiar audiences may find that packaging or digital content gives potential customers a clearer account of the product and its origins. For organizations that support micro and small enterprises, these dimensions can inform discussions about which branding practices fit the producer's resources and market. The framework draws on 12 purposively selected cases, and its dimensions have yet to be evaluated comparatively. Further research could compare producers' intended messages with how first-time and repeat buyers interpret them, then follow those buyers over time to assess whether perceived authenticity, community relationships, quality practices, and adaptation are associated with sustained trust.

CONCLUSION

Across the 12 cases, branding practices included communicating family or local identity, using community and digital channels, maintaining product quality, and responding to changing consumer preferences. Business actors described these practices as relevant to consumer trust, but the qualitative design does not rank their effectiveness or establish causal effects. The proposed AKSI framework—Authenticity, *Komunitas* (community), System, and Innovation—organizes these observed themes as a conceptual contribution rather than a validated model.

The findings suggest that home-based tempeh businesses can integrate structured brand communication with relationships built through customer experience. Support institutions may consider context-sensitive training and sustained mentoring, whose comparative effectiveness remains to be tested. The study is limited to 12 cases and the information reported by its participants; future work could examine consumer accounts more systematically, compare regions, and test AKSI quantitatively or longitudinally.

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Moc. Chozin and Yunus Handoko contribute to research design, data collection and processing, system development, result analysis, and article manuscript preparation.

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