

REINFORCING LEGACY BRAND: TRANSFORMING CONSUMER PERCEPTIONS THROUGH BRAND STRATEGIES IN THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY

Mario Putra Sudja¹
Satya Aditya Wibowo²
Nila Armelia Windasari³

¹Mahasiswa Pascasarjana Magister Administrasi Bisnis, Sekolah Bisnis dan Manajemen
Institut Teknologi Bandung, Indonesia

^{2,3}Dosen Pascasarjana Magister Administrasi Bisnis, Sekolah Bisnis dan Manajemen Institut
Teknologi Bandung, Indonesia

[¹mario_sudja@sbm-itb.ac.id](mailto:mario_sudja@sbm-itb.ac.id)
[²satyawibowo@sbm-itb.ac.id](mailto:satyawibowo@sbm-itb.ac.id)
[³nila.armelia@sbm-itb.ac.id](mailto:nila.armelia@sbm-itb.ac.id)

ABSTRACT

This study investigates brand strategies for sustaining the relevance of legacy brands in Indonesia's highly regulated and socially sensitive tobacco industry. The focus is on Djarum Super, an iconic kretek cigarette brand with a historically loyal customer base that is currently struggling to connect with younger consumers. A qualitative case study approach was used, combining in-depth interviews, projective techniques, and digital ethnography to explore consumer perceptions, brand associations, and behavioral tendencies. The research engaged 15 male respondents aged 21–35 from urban areas, selected based on smoking behavior and socioeconomic profile. The analysis applied Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) framework and thematic content analysis to identify the brand's current positioning and consumer resonance. Findings reveal a clear generational divide: older consumers demonstrate attachment based on nostalgia, cultural pride, and masculine identity, while younger consumers perceive the brand as outdated, harsh in flavor, and disconnected from modern lifestyles. The study highlights the need for revitalizing brand salience through updated visual identity, emotionally driven storytelling, and culturally relevant messaging. Moreover, digital co-creation and community-based marketing are proposed to foster engagement without violating advertising restrictions. This repositioning should aim to reframe the brand's image not by abandoning its heritage but by reshaping it into a more inclusive and aspirational narrative. The study contributes practical insights for brand managers navigating generational shifts, consumer perception gaps, and strict regulatory environments. It also offers a strategic model for legacy brands attempting to bridge tradition with innovation in evolving consumer landscapes.

Keywords: Brand Equity, Repositioning, Tobacco Industry, Consumer Perception

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¹ Corresponding author: Mario Putra Sudja. Email: mario_sudja@sbm-itb.ac.id

1. INTRODUCTION

The tobacco industry holds a multidimensional role in Indonesia's socio-economic, political, and cultural life. Far beyond being a mere economic sector, it represents a deeply embedded cultural practice and a symbol of national identity, particularly through the consumption of kretek a uniquely Indonesian clove cigarette that blends indigenous tobacco with spices (Imron et al., 2020). Indonesia ranks among the largest tobacco markets in the world, with cigarette consumption rates placing the country just below China in Asia. Based on recent data from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2024) and the Indonesian Central Statistics Agency (2024) over 60 percent of adult males are active smokers, a figure that has remained relatively stable despite global downward trends. This persistent consumption behavior reflects not only individual preferences but also complex historical, economic, and cultural legacies that define smoking in Indonesia as an accepted if not expected social norm, especially among men.

Tobacco use in Indonesia transcends economic classes, educational backgrounds, and age groups (Hapsari, 2022). Cigarettes are readily available and relatively affordable, making them a staple commodity in both urban and rural areas. In daily life, the visibility of smoking is ubiquitous: on street corners, in markets, among workers, and within households (Megatsari et al., 2021). Smoking has become integrated into rituals of hospitality, masculinity, solidarity, and even spirituality (Suarjana et al., 2022). These cultural dynamics have shaped a domestic tobacco market that continues to thrive despite international pressure, public health campaigns, and mounting evidence of smoking-related diseases. Unlike many countries that have made significant progress in reducing tobacco prevalence, Indonesia's regulatory framework remains comparatively lenient, partly due to its dependence on tobacco as a major source of fiscal revenue (Dasep, 2024).

From an economic standpoint, the tobacco industry is a backbone of the Indonesian economy. It supports a vast network of interrelated industries—ranging from agricultural production of tobacco and cloves to industrial manufacturing, packaging, transportation, and retail. According to the Ministry of Finance, tobacco excise revenue contributed over IDR 170 trillion (approximately USD 11 billion) in 2022, representing one of the country's most substantial sources of non-oil-and-gas fiscal income (Nugroho & Setijaningrum, 2023). Furthermore, the industry directly and indirectly employs millions of Indonesians, from farmers in Central and East Java to factory workers in Kudus and other industrial centers. The socio-

economic significance of this industry has led to a political balancing act: while there is increasing domestic and international pressure to regulate tobacco consumption for public health reasons, there is also a strong imperative to protect the livelihoods and fiscal stability that the industry sustains (Bella et al., 2024).

From a market structure perspective, the tobacco industry in Indonesia is highly concentrated and oligopolistic. Data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (2024) indicate that the average monthly per capita expenditure on cigarettes and tobacco products reaches IDR 94,476, making it one of the top five household spending categories in national consumption. In addition, the tobacco market is dominated by three major players: PT HM Sampoerna (29%), PT Gudang Garam (22%), and PT Djarum (21%) (Tobacco Tactics, 2024). Collectively, these companies control more than 70% of cigarette sales in Indonesia, particularly in the kretek segment, which accounts for over 90% of domestic tobacco consumption. PT Djarum's flagship product, Djarum Super, operates within this highly competitive landscape and must adapt its brand strategy accordingly.

In this context, the Indonesian cigarette market is characterized by oligopolistic dominance, with three major corporations : PT Djarum, PT HM Sampoerna (a subsidiary of Philip Morris International), and PT Gudang Garam, controlling the majority of production and market share (Mikraj et al., 2024). PT Djarum, has established itself as a major player not only in tobacco but also across a diversified business portfolio that spans finance, electronics, property, and digital services. Among its most iconic tobacco products is Djarum Super, a premium full-flavored machine-made kretek cigarette introduced in 1981. Built upon a legacy of craftsmanship and boldness, Djarum Super became synonymous with a masculine image, robust taste, and loyal consumer base. For decades, it has positioned itself as a heritage brand representing consistency, quality, and tradition in a dynamic and competitive marketplace (El Syam & Al-halim, 2023).

Despite its strong heritage and historic success, Djarum Super now faces significant challenges on multiple fronts. First, regulatory dynamics have shifted dramatically. The Indonesian government has progressively increased excise taxes on cigarettes, particularly targeting Tier 1 SKM (Sigaret Kretek Mesin) products such as Djarum Super. These tax hikes have raised production costs and retail prices, thus narrowing the brand's competitive edge (Bella et al., 2024). Moreover, legislative reforms have severely restricted advertising, sponsorships, and promotional activities, particularly in mainstream media and public spaces. Tobacco companies can no longer freely communicate brand identity, emotional appeal, or aspirational narratives through traditional platforms. The era of large scale music event sponsorships, televised advertisements, and glamorous billboards is over, and brands are forced to find more subtle and strategic ways to engage with their consumers (Sukmadi et al., 2023).

Second, and perhaps more critically, consumer preferences are evolving in ways that threaten legacy brands with rigid identities. Today's consumers especially those in the 18–30 year are more discerning, image conscious, and health aware. They tend to associate smoking with lifestyle signaling, identity construction, and social currency rather than tradition or habit. As a result, brands that fail to resonate with their values, language, and aesthetics are at risk of alienation (Wibowo et al., 2025). Competitors such as A Mild and Magnum Filter have successfully navigated this generational shift by embracing minimalist branding, smoother product profiles, and campaigns that emphasize self-expression, individuality, and urban coolness. These brands are not only reshaping consumer perceptions of what smoking represents, but also establishing new benchmarks for relevance, loyalty, and market share (Siregar & Sinar, 2021).

Conversely, Djarum Super is increasingly perceived as an “older man's brand.” Internal data and external surveys indicate that its consumer base is disproportionately concentrated among males aged 35–55, with declining engagement from younger segments. While the brand's longstanding identity may still carry symbolic value for its core market, its lack of resonance with newer, younger consumers poses an existential threat. The brand is not necessarily seen as inferior, but rather irrelevant an attribute far more dangerous in an age where relevance drives preference (Hermawan et al., 2024). From a branding perspective, this challenge is best understood through the lens of Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model, which emphasizes brand salience, imagery, performance, judgments, feelings, and resonance as cumulative factors in building strong brand equity (Stukalina & Pavlyuk, 2021). Musyfiqoh (2024) further argues that a brand must possess meaningful differentiation and emotional connection to survive competitive pressures. Djarum Super appears to be faltering on both counts.

Compounding these issues is the rising competition from not only established tobacco brands but also new entrants in the form of alternative nicotine products. Heated tobacco products, nicotine pouches, and e-cigarettes are gaining traction among Indonesia's urban youth, presenting both a market threat and a perception shift (Wibowo et al., 2025). While these alternatives are still in their early stages of penetration, they appeal to a growing population of smokers who seek harm-reduction narratives or simply more fashionable consumption experiences. Brands such as IQOS have already begun positioning themselves in the high-end, health-conscious smoker category, offering sleek devices, tech-enabled controls, and digital-native marketing strategies that legacy cigarette brands have yet to match (Duan et al., 2023).

Faced with these converging pressures regulatory constraints, demographic disengagement, and technological disruption—legacy brands such as Djarum Super are

compelled to undergo strategic transformation. It is no longer sufficient to rely on history, recognition, or habitual loyalty. Brand strength must be cultivated through continuous dialogue with consumers, adaptive repositioning, and emotional relevance. In the case of Djarum Super, this requires a fundamental reassessment of brand positioning, communication style, and market engagement mechanisms. According to Keller (2020) strategic brand management involves not only preserving brand identity but also realigning it to evolving consumer landscapes through rigorous brand audits, repositioning frameworks, and customer insight integration.

This study is situated precisely within this context of transformation. It aims to explore how Djarum Super, as a legacy tobacco brand, can reinforce its brand equity and reposition itself in a constrained yet dynamic marketplace. Utilizing a qualitative methodology that integrates in-depth interviews with consumers, ethnographic analysis of digital discourse, and triangulated secondary data from industry reports, the research adopts Keller's brand audit framework to diagnose current positioning and identify strategic opportunities. The study goes beyond surface level marketing recommendations to interrogate the deeper symbolic and emotional meanings that consumers attach to brands, particularly in contested industries such as tobacco, where advertising is heavily restricted and public sentiment is increasingly fragmented.

By doing so, the research seeks to offer actionable insights for practitioners, scholars, and policymakers alike. For brand strategists, it provides a roadmap for sustaining relevance in a post-loyalty era. For academics, it contributes to the discourse on brand equity management in high-regulation sectors. And for public health and regulatory bodies, it illustrates the adaptive mechanisms that firms employ in response to policy changes thus informing more effective, evidence-based interventions. Ultimately, this study endeavors to bridge theoretical branding models with practical, culturally situated brand revitalization strategies in the Indonesian context.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Brand Equity and Legacy Brands

Brand equity refers to the added value that a brand provides through consumer perception, loyalty, and price premium potential (Aminu & Ahmad, (2018); Pfeifer et al., (2025); Kunle et al., (2020)). In legacy brands, equity is often grounded in emotional bonds and historical relevance but sustaining it requires adaptation to new consumer values.

In the tobacco industry, where direct advertising is restricted, packaging acts as the core branding medium. Visual design elements such as logos, color schemes, and motifs—strongly

influence young consumers' perceptions of appeal and health risks (Guo et al., 2022). Intervention studies from the U.S., Cambodia, and Singapore confirm that pack color and warning labels affect beliefs, brand segmentation, and perceived product quality (Ng et al., (2024); Grilo et al., (2021); Shang et al., (2021)).

For legacy brands like Djarum, sustaining brand equity under these constraints demands strategic packaging, merchandising, and selective point-of-sale activations. Without such adaptations, emotional connections built over decades risk fading.

2.2 Brand Repositioning Strategy

Brand repositioning is the strategic shift in how consumers perceive a brand, typically in response to changing market dynamics (Arbi & Aminah, (2023); Prayoga, (2020)). Bhatia (2023) classifies repositioning into image, product, tangible, and intangible types—depending on which elements of the brand or market are adjusted.

In tobacco, where direct promotion is heavily restricted, repositioning depends on subtle tactics. In Singapore, companies responded to plain packaging regulations by launching new flavors, altering stick length, and modifying foil textures to maintain product distinction (van der Eijk & Yang, 2022). Even minor changes in pack dimensions or color intensity can reshape perceptions of appeal and risk (Lee et al., 2021).

Beyond packaging, many brands extend into adjacent categories like nicotine pouches or heated tobacco to remain relevant under evolving regulations. For legacy brands in Indonesia, repositioning must combine sensory innovation with product extension, subtly refreshing brand image while retaining symbolic equity.

2.3 Brand Audit: Inventory and Exploratory

Brand audit is a holistic evaluation of brand health, comprising two key components: brand inventory, which assesses internal elements such as logos, packaging, and marketing activities, and brand exploratory, which examines consumer perceptions and emotional associations (Suhardi et al (2022); Anjum et al (2022)). This framework is crucial for legacy brands like Djarum Super that face declining relevance among younger consumers despite strong internal consistency.

In highly regulated industries, where overt advertising is limited, external perceptions hinge on subtle visual cues. Empirical studies show that standardized packaging reduces brand appeal, prestige, and recognition (Ng et al., 2024). Research in Cambodia and China confirms that packaging color and branding alone shape youth perceptions of quality, appeal, and risk (Stubbs et al., (2022); Guo et al., (2022)).

From an inventory standpoint, consistent visual elements such as color schemes, logo fidelity, and flavor descriptors—form brand identity in markets like the U.S. (Thompson et al., 2023). By aligning internal identity with external perception, legacy tobacco brands can detect critical gaps and respond through packaging refinement or product variation to better engage younger consumers in Indonesia.

2.4 Emotional Branding and Symbolic Meaning

Emotional branding strengthens loyalty by creating symbolic meaning—such as masculinity, heritage, or lifestyle relevance, especially among younger consumers (Meneses et al., 2023). Brands that evoke strong emotions are more likely to shape lasting impressions (Gustafson, 2017), a critical factor in regulated industries like tobacco where functional differentiation and advertising are limited.

Research in Cambodia shows that even without brand names, packaging colors and design elements evoke perceptions of status, gender, quality, and harm, reinforcing emotional responses to brand identity (Stubbs et al., 2022). Similarly, Gendall et al. (2021) found that packaging alone can trigger symbolic associations and brand personality judgments among young adults. Emotional cues are especially effective with Gen Z, who respond more to aspirational imagery than to rational appeals (Vrtana & Krizanova, 2023).

For legacy brands like Djarum Super, emotional resonance must be maintained through packaging elements that signal identity and aspiration. In the absence of overt media, colors, imagery, and flavor cues become vital tools for sustaining engagement and relevance.

2.5 Branding in Regulated Industries

Strict regulations on advertising, health warnings, and promotions compel tobacco companies to adopt indirect branding tactics (Mirza, (2019); (Prayetno et al., 2023). These include packaging innovation, experiential marketing, and event sponsorships to maintain visibility while complying with legal constraints.

In Indonesia, brands like H.M. Sampoerna sponsor youth-focused events such as Soundrenaline, embedding cigarette branding within cultural experiences amplified through hashtags and social media (Astuti et al., (2018); Mirza, (2019)). Point-of-sale promotions often link offline visibility to online engagement.

Digital platforms also support brand stretching strategies. Tobacco companies use lifestyle content to associate their products with modern youth identity (Mutmainnah & Utaminingtyas, 2020). Influencers on Instagram and TikTok integrate cigarette use into aspirational posts, effectively bypassing advertising restrictions (Nasution et al., 2024).

Legacy brands like Djarum Super navigate this environment by reinforcing symbolic narratives, heritage, masculinity, adventure through design, events, and online presence. As

Rindell & Pinto (2021) note, emotional and cultural symbolism is essential for maintaining resonance under regulatory pressure.

3. METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research design, aligned with Keller's (2020) Brand Audit Framework, which consists of two core components: brand inventory (internal brand management practices) and brand exploratory (external consumer perceptions and associations).

3.1. Research Design

To assess the current brand position of Djarum Super and identify strategic branding opportunities, the study employed Keller's (2020) *Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE)* and brand audit frameworks. These frameworks are widely used to evaluate both consumer perception and internal brand strategy. The brand audit comprises:

1. Brand Inventory

Identification and documentation of current brand elements and marketing programs such as logos, slogans, promotions, pricing, and distribution strategy.

2. Brand Exploratory

Investigation of consumer brand knowledge, including awareness, associations, perceived quality, loyalty, and emotional responses.

In addition to Keller's model, the study also integrates Porter's Five Forces (Porter, 2008), PESTEL analysis, and SWOT analysis to assess external environmental factors that influence brand perception and competitiveness in the tobacco industry.

3.2. Data Collection

The research relies on a combination of primary and secondary data to ensure data triangulation and enhance credibility:

1. Primary Data

Collected via in-depth semi-structured interviews using Free Association and Projective Techniques Keller's (2020). A total of 15 respondents (male smokers aged 21–35, SES middle-up) were selected across major cities (Jakarta, Bogor, Bekasi, Bandung). Respondents were selected based on brand familiarity and usage experience.

- a. Free Association: Participants responded spontaneously to prompts like "What comes to mind when you hear 'Djarum Super'?"

- b. Projective Techniques: Respondents were asked to personify Djarum Super (e.g., “If Djarum Super were a person, what would it be like?”) to explore deeper symbolic and emotional meaning.

2. Netnography

Observations of consumer discussions on digital platforms such as YouTube (@SuperTVIndonesia and @rokokindonesia7806) were conducted to capture natural consumer sentiment and engagement with Djarum Super advertisements and product reviews (Kozinets, 2010).

3. Secondary Data

Internal documents and brand health reports from PT Djarum, including marketing activities, promotional strategies, and historical brand performance. These were used to construct the brand inventory and validate consumer perceptions found in primary data.

3.3. Data Analysis

A combination of analytical tools was applied:

1. Content Analysis (Creswell, 2014): used to identify themes from interview transcripts and online data.
2. SWOT Analysis: synthesizes internal strengths and weaknesses with external opportunities and threats, informed by qualitative insights and market data.
3. PESTEL Analysis: examines Political, Economic, Sociocultural, Technological, Environmental, and Legal factors shaping the tobacco industry environment.
4. Porter’s Five Forces: assesses industry structure and competitive intensity.
5. Triangulation: cross-verification of data from interviews, netnography, and company documents to enhance validity.

3.4. Operational Definitions and Indicators

Table 1. 3.4. Operational Definitions and Indicators

No	Variable	Definition	Indicator	Source
1	Brand Equity	The differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to marketing	Brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, brand loyalty	Aaker (1996) Keller's (2020)
2	Brand Awareness	The ability of consumers to recognize or recall a brand	Brand recognition, brand recall	Aaker (1996) Keller's (2020)
3	Brand Image	Perceptions about a brand as reflected by brand associations held in memory	Attributes, benefits, attitudes	Keller's (2020)
4	Brand Personality	Human characteristics associated with a brand	Style, identity, emotional appeal	Aaker (1996) Schiffman & Kanuk (2010)
5	Customer Perception	How consumers think and feel about a brand, and how they behave toward it	Preference, loyalty, perception of relevance	Kotler & Keller (2016)

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis presented below is derived from triangulated data, including in-depth interviews (n=15), netnographic observation on YouTube channels (@SuperTVIndonesia, @rokokindonesia7806), and internal company documents. Content analysis was applied to interpret interview transcripts, while thematic coding identified recurring motifs across digital discourse. External analyses (PESTEL, SWOT, and Porter's Five Forces) were informed by both primary data themes and secondary sources such as industry reports and government statistics. This ensures that each insight is grounded in empirical data and consistent with the methodological procedures outlined.

4.1. Brand Audit Evaluation

The brand audit is a foundational tool for assessing brand equity, comprising internal evaluation (brand inventory) and external consumer-based assessment (brand exploratory). It provides a holistic view of brand assets, equity structure, and consumer relationships (Suhardi et al., 2022).

4.1.1.Brand Inventory

Djarum Super's internal brand architecture is designed around a distinctive identity that blends heritage with performance driven modernity. The brand name itself communicates legacy and excellence. The word "Djarum" references its roots in precision craftsmanship, originally linked to phonograph needle production. The term "Super" signifies elevated status, quality, and performance. This duality of tradition and superiority is consistently projected through the brand's communication.

Visually, the brand utilizes a bold, masculine color scheme: red (symbolizing passion and power), black (elegance and strength), and gold (premium quality and legacy). These colors appear on all packaging and advertisements. Packaging is uniform across variants and sizes, from Super 12 and 16 to the economical 50 pack, reinforcing the visual equity of the brand. Visual identity is further supported by the iconic red-framed logo that immediately signals brand recognition in retail environments.

The slogan "*#IniRasanyaSuper*" functions as a powerful brand cue. It not only emphasizes taste as a core brand promise but also fosters emotional appeal by encouraging consumers to associate the product with unique sensations and social identity. As noted in Keller (2020), effective slogans anchor memory structures and emotional associations, and Djarum Super's consistent use of this slogan across ATL and BTL communication enhances recall.

The brand personality is crafted through five dominant traits: masculine, confident, adventurous, nostalgic, and bold. These are expressed in every campaign from offroad Jeep visuals to extreme sports imagery and rock concert backdrops. This strategic persona aligns the brand with Indonesia's male working class segment, particularly those who seek self-expression and identity affirmation through symbolic consumption.

The product portfolio strategy reflects vertical segmentation. Djarum Super 12 appeals to premium users, while 16 and 50 are for value-driven smokers. MLD and Espresso variants serve distinct psychological segments urban professionals and price-sensitive youth. Packaging design for each variant maintains core visual identity while offering functional variety, in accordance with Aaker's brand portfolio theory.

The pricing strategy maintains affordability while signaling premium quality. With Djarum Super 12 priced at IDR 25,000 just below Gudang Garam Surya 12, Djarum strategically attracts aspirational smokers who want premium experiences without crossing affordability thresholds. Distribution is expansive and includes general trade, modern retail, and DRP partnerships that provide branded materials, display units, and retailer loyalty programs.

Communication strategy is constrained by Indonesian tobacco regulations, yet Djarum Super responds with innovation. Through surrogate branding : Supermusic, Superadventure, it builds lifestyle associations around music, adventure, and youth culture. ATL (TV, cinema,

OTT) is complemented by BTL (experiential marketing, brand booths) and digital marketing through YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok.

4.1.2.Brand Exploratory

The brand exploratory delves into consumer perceptions and experiences. Keller's CBBE model is particularly effective here, enabling a layered understanding of brand equity through salience, performance, imagery, judgment, feelings, and resonance.

Consumer interviews across Jakarta, Bandung, Bogor, and Surabaya revealed deeply ingrained brand salience. Most participants were introduced to Djarum Super through familial influence—parents, uncles, or older neighbors. This multigenerational exposure reflects cultural continuity. In nearly all interviews, participants could recall brand colors, packaging, and past commercials with ease, highlighting strong mnemonic value.

Regarding performance, the brand is viewed as delivering robust flavor and aromatic richness. Participants describe the product as “*nendang*,” “*kaya*,” and “*berkarakter*.” The combination of thick smoke and distinctive aftertaste provides a unique smoking ritual. Some describe it as a companion during hard work, stress, or post-meal relaxation.

However, not all feedback is positive. Casual smokers and younger users reported that Djarum Super was “*terlalu berat*” or “*bikin batuk*,” suggesting an opportunity to introduce lighter variants under the same brand halo.

Imagery analysis shows that users associate Djarum Super with rugged independence, mature masculinity, and street credibility. The brand is often linked with blue-collar workers, creative freelancers, and music scene participants. While this strengthens brand loyalty in some segments, it narrows appeal among younger and more image-conscious consumers who prioritize minimalism, versatility, and wellness.

Brand judgments highlight a complex perception. While most users express trust in product quality and taste, they also mention the brand's failure to evolve visually. Terms like “*jadul*,” “*lawas*,” and “*kurang keren*” reflect the social burden of being seen with the brand in public spaces. In this sense, brand equity is high on familiarity and performance but challenged on symbolic modernity.

Brand feelings range from deep nostalgia linked to family and youth memories to social discomfort in professional or trendy environments. The emotional contradiction is potent: “*Itu rokok terbaik, tapi saya malu kalau ngerokok Super di kafe.*”

Resonance is evident in continued loyalty and preference. Users often say they would not switch even if prices increased. However, advocacy is weak. Very few users actively promote the brand or engage in communities. This confirms Keller's insight that true brand resonance

requires both attitudinal and behavioral loyalty, including active participation and brand evangelism.

4.1.3. Netnography

Netnographic research was conducted by analyzing consumer commentary on YouTube, particularly on @SuperTVIndonesia and @rokokindonesia7806. From hundreds of user comments, thematic coding identified recurring expressions of loyalty, nostalgia, taste satisfaction, and critique.

Positive sentiments focused on legacy appeal: “*Masih Djarum Super dari zaman SMA sampai sekarang,*” “*Kalau ngomong soal rokok laki, Super nggak ada lawan.*” Others referenced iconic ads and campaigns from the 2000s: “*Iklan Jeep itu legendaris.*”

However, criticisms emerged around reduced flavor consistency and outdated advertising: “*Rasa sudah berubah, nggak seperti dulu,*” “*Iklannya makin nggak greget.*” There’s also an undercurrent of disillusionment, with users questioning whether the brand understands modern smokers: “*Super kayak kehabisan ide, sekarang gitu-gitu aja.*”

Netnography also shows that Djarum Super lacks community-generated content. There is no vibrant fanbase or user-generated campaigns like those of international brands. This lack of community engagement underscores the need for Djarum Super to invest in digital storytelling and consumer co-creation.

4.1.4. Brand Resonance Pyramid

Applying Keller’s (2020) six-level pyramid framework.

1. Brand Salience: extremely high due to long-term market presence and multigenerational use.
2. Brand Performance: robust flavor, consistency, and affordability are well regarded.
3. Brand Imagery: masculine, mature, rugged, but lacks modernity and freshness.
4. Brand Judgment: loyal users trust the product but acknowledge social limitations.
5. Brand Feelings: strong emotions linked to nostalgia, pride, but also social awkwardness.
6. Brand Resonance: loyalty exists but is not accompanied by community participation or advocacy.

This evaluation places Djarum Super in the upper-middle tier of brand equity strength, with strong foundational blocks but weak resonance activation. This assessment is grounded in triangulated data collected from in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, digital ethnography on YouTube platforms, and internal brand documentation. Each level of the pyramid reflects coded themes consistently observed across these data sources.

4.2. External Analysis

4.2.1. PESTEL Analysis

External environmental conditions were evaluated using a PESTEL framework, integrating qualitative insights from consumer interviews, company documents, and policy literature. Participants frequently cited regulatory constraints and cultural shifts when discussing perceptions of tobacco use and branding. These inputs were mapped against secondary policy documents and media coverage to construct a comprehensive environmental scan.

1. Political. Repeated references by interviewees to “*nggak bisa iklan lagi*” and “*dulu sering lihat di TV*” signal the impact of Regulation No. 109/2012 and ongoing advertising bans. Internal brand documents corroborated the shift to surrogate branding due to legislative constraints.
2. Economic. Consumer narratives around price sensitivity and preference shifts (e.g., “*kalah mahal, pindah ke rokok lain*”) reflect macroeconomic pressure, aligned with inflation and wage stagnation trends in BPS 2024 reports.
3. Social. Thematic codes from interviews show increasing discomfort among young consumers regarding traditional smoking identities, aligning with broader public health campaigns and gender norm shifts.
4. Technological. Digitalization was highlighted in both netnographic observation and company strategy documents as a new channel for engagement under advertising limitations.
5. Environmental & Legal. Qualitative codes referring to “*sampah rokok*” and “*rokok ilegal*” were triangulated with industry reports, affirming concerns over waste, illicit trade, and regulatory enforcement.

4.2.2. Porter Five Forces

Competitive intensity was analyzed using Porter’s framework. Data from FGDs and online comments were coded for mentions of competitors, price concerns, and brand switching behavior.

1. Threat of New Entrants: minimal mention in interviews, but secondary data suggests niche hand-rolled brands gaining traction regionally.
2. Supplier Power: inferred from company documentation indicating fluctuations in raw material pricing (e.g., clove price trends from internal procurement reports).
3. Buyer Power: high sensitivity to image, price, and trendiness observed in younger respondents; consistent with data from FGDs and netnography.
4. Substitute Threat: strong sentiment in younger segments favoring alternatives like vape and IQOS (“*lebih modern*,” “*nggak terlalu bau*”), echoing secondary trend data (Wibowo et al., 2025).

5. Rivalry Among Competitors: frequent mentions of Magnum and A Mild in interviews and YouTube comments confirmed intense brand rivalry in younger market segments.

4.2.3. Analisis Swot

The SWOT matrix was constructed based on coded themes from interviews, netnographic observation, and internal brand audits. Perceptions of “taste strength,” “robust flavor,” and emotional nostalgia emerged as internal strengths. These were consistently expressed by loyal users and long-term consumers in both interviews and YouTube comment sections. On the other hand, the brand’s outdated visual identity and limited digital engagement were frequently cited as internal weaknesses, especially by younger participants who described the brand as “*jadul*,” “*kurang keren*,” or “*tidak relevan*.”

Externally, opportunities center around growing digital media engagement, demand for personalized experiences, and shifting preferences toward eco-conscious branding. Several respondents expressed interest in product variants that feel more modern or health-conscious, indicating space for lighter sub-labels and digital storytelling. Threats identified include intensifying competition from brands like Magnum and Sampoerna A Mild, the rising popularity of vapes and heated tobacco products, and increasing regulatory restrictions that limit brand communication. These external threats were consistently reinforced across interview narratives, online discourse, and industry reports.

4.3. Brand Health Check

The brand health diagnosis was conducted across nine cities, using FGD transcripts coded for persona perception, symbolic value, and engagement triggers. Differences across age groups and cities were analyzed thematically to detect geographic and psychographic variation. This layered analysis ensures that reported results reflect not just opinions but deeper identity narratives grounded in context. Awareness was uniformly high among adult smokers aged 25–40, particularly among workers and freelancers who view Djarum Super as a staple. However, among younger respondents aged 18–24, brand recognition began to show variation depending on geography, lifestyle, and brand exposure.

Participants in Yogyakarta and Bandung cities known for their creative youth communities showed higher recall of Djarum Super due to frequent encounters through events and retail presence. Meanwhile, youth in Jakarta and Semarang displayed fragmented awareness, citing preferences for international or image-oriented brands such as Magnum and Sampoerna A Mild.

Brand personification exercises across FGDs were revealing. Djarum Super was described consistently as a 30–40 year confident, low-profile, hardworking, and loyal. He works in creative or manual labor settings, listens to indie or rock music, and smokes in social but

subdued contexts. While this persona resonates with older loyalists, it lacks aspirational appeal for Gen Z, who seek personalization, inclusivity, and “cool factor.”

Younger respondents described Djarum Super’s persona as someone who “doesn’t follow trends,” “is stuck in the past,” or “cues masculinity too hard.” This perception gap indicates a generational brand equity erosion. FGDs revealed that while older users remain loyal based on sensory satisfaction and emotional attachment, younger users are deterred by social perception, limited digital presence, and lack of personalization.

The absence of community based campaigns, gamified brand interaction, or influencer led endorsements further weakens resonance. Compared to competitors with strong brand ecosystems (e.g., Magnum with Magnumotion, Gudang Garam with Suryanation), Djarum Super relies heavily on legacy without renewing touchpoints.

To enhance the credibility and validity of the findings, the study employed triangulation across multiple qualitative sources, including in-depth interviews, digital ethnography, and internal company documentation. Themes identified in participant narratives—such as perceptions of flavor strength, outdated brand imagery, and shifting generational preferences were consistently echoed in online consumer discussions and supported by internal brand audits. For instance, the descriptor “jadul” appeared both in direct interviews and in YouTube comment threads, reinforcing the perception gap among younger consumers. Similarly, brand loyalty expressed by older respondents aligned with historical sales trends found in company records. This convergence of independent data sources strengthens the interpretive depth of the analysis and reduces the risk of single-source bias.

4.4. Competitor Analysis

The competitive landscape is highly saturated with brands fighting for dominance in both image and taste-based segments. Key rivals include Gudang Garam Surya, Gudang Garam International, and Magnum Filter. Gudang Garam Surya leads with 11% SKM market share in 2024, sustaining its position through aggressive surrogate branding, targeted pricing, and a strong masculine image.

Magnum Filter, while holding a modest 2.7% share, is gaining popularity among young urban smokers. Its minimalist aesthetic, light flavor, and youth-centric brand events have positioned it as an aspirational yet accessible option. Its integration with digital platforms and influencer partnerships gives it the cultural edge.

In contrast, Djarum Super still holds significant loyalty among core segments but risks stagnation. Its masculine, retro identity, while iconic, is perceived as rigid and disconnected from modern consumer aspirations. Product-wise, it competes strongly in taste and quality, but lags in brand engagement, modern symbolism, and adaptability.

Price-wise, Djarum Super remains competitive, slightly undercutting Surya and overlapping with Magnum. However, it does not differentiate strongly in terms of brand image or digital relevance. In focus groups, participants indicated that Magnum's user experience felt "personal," while Super felt "historical." This points to a need for Djarum Super to invest in narrative refresh and experience co-creation.

4.5. Brand Challenges and Opportunities

Djarum Super's legacy is both its greatest asset and its biggest challenge. The brand's long-standing image and product consistency have created emotional loyalty among mature users, yet have also boxed the brand into a narrow identity category. The challenges and opportunities discussed in this section were synthesized from triangulated qualitative data, including interview transcripts, online consumer discussions (netnography), and internal brand documents. These points emerged from thematic analysis of recurring patterns across these sources.

Challenges include

1. Generational disconnect: younger consumers feel alienated by the brand's outdated masculine aesthetic.
2. Limited brand dynamism: visuals and messaging have not evolved significantly in the last decade.
3. Perceived heaviness: flavor strength is appreciated by loyalists but deters new or casual users.
4. Stigma in social settings: smokers feel reluctant to be seen with the product in modern or mixed social environments.
5. Low digital engagement: weak presence in influencer culture and content co-creation limits cultural relevance.

Opportunities include

1. Brand rejuvenation: reimagine the brand through collaborative storytelling with youth influencers.
2. Segmented innovation: launch lighter or menthol variants under sub-labels targeting youth segments.
3. Sustainability storytelling: introduce eco-conscious packaging and sourcing narratives to align with green values.
4. Digital immersion: build immersive experiences through apps, events, and online communities.
5. Community building: foster smoker clubs, loyalty programs, and user-generated campaigns that give voice to loyalists and explorers alike.

4.6. Strategic Implications and Recommendations

To ensure long-term viability and broaden brand resonance, Djarum Super must strategically balance heritage with evolution. Key recommendations include:

1. Brand Visual Refresh: modernize packaging and campaign aesthetics without losing core identifiers. Introduce flexible visual systems for sub brands.
2. Product Line Extension: launch new SKUs that cater to lifestyle and sensory preferences of younger users, possibly with flavor innovations and filter technologies.
3. Digital Co-Creation Platforms: develop mobile-first platforms for user-generated content, feedback loops, and digital storytelling competitions.
4. Reframe Masculinity: recast the brand narrative to reflect confidence, authenticity, and inclusion rather than rigidity.
5. Experiential Activations: create localized campaigns and micro-events that connect users with the brand in immersive, music or community-based contexts.
6. Emotional Storytelling: use nostalgia strategically to re-engage lapsed users while crafting aspirational journeys for new audiences.

5. CONCLUSION

This study provides an in-depth exploration of how legacy brand strategies influence consumer perception in Indonesia's tobacco industry. Using a combination of brand audit, consumer-based brand equity frameworks, and external analysis tools such as PESTEL and Porter's Five Forces, the research reveals that while Djarum Super retains strong historical equity and symbolic associations, its current brand positioning is misaligned with evolving consumer expectations, particularly among younger segments. The findings indicate that without proactive digital adaptation and updated brand narratives, the brand risks eroding relevance in a competitive and regulated environment.

However, this study acknowledges several limitations. First, the research does not fully capture the broader structural dynamics of the tobacco industry in Indonesia, particularly in relation to current strategies of major competitors such as Djarum or HM Sampoerna. This is partly due to restricted access to proprietary company data and limited transparency within the industry. Additionally, the study's sample was limited to younger male smokers aged 21–35 in urban areas, which may not fully reflect broader demographic variations in smoking behavior or brand perception. This focus, combined with the qualitative nature of the study, limits the generalizability of the findings and may overlook strategic shifts occurring among

other consumer segments or within the corporate landscape post 2024. Consequently, the analysis may not reflect the most recent shifts in corporate strategy or consumer engagement practices at scale. Future studies are encouraged to incorporate longitudinal data, quantitative validation, or comparative analysis across brands to deepen the strategic understanding of legacy branding in regulated markets.

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