

# The Struggle is Real: Strategic Marketing Communication and the Survivability of Indonesian Local Fashion Brands

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## Abstract

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Indonesian local brands struggle as they compete with global brands, with some surviving while others collapse. As local fashion brands contribute significantly to the Indonesian economy, this study will focus on such brands. Strategic marketing communication is pivotal in supporting local fashion brands, not only because it raises brand awareness, but also because it creates good local brand equity. As such, this study seeks to contribute an understanding of how local fashion brands survive in the midst of global competition, with a particular focus on the use of strategic marketing communication to build brand equity among millennials (the largest market today). Using an explanatory sequential design and the mixed methods research, this study aims, first, to quantify the level of local brand equity. A quantitative approach is thus intended: i) to identify the most widely recognized fashion brands in Yogyakarta; ii) to measure the equity of local fashion brands; iii) to identify each brand equity's contribution to brand equity development. Using convenience sampling, the study asked 504 respondents about top-of-mind local fashion brands; 488 of these respondents were asked about their perceptions of brand equity. The study then qualitatively measures the use of strategic marketing communication to establish brand equity, using in-depth interviews to collect data on the local fashion brands Dagadu and Amazara. It finds that local fashion brands have mid-level brand equity and limited brand quality, and as such require more strategic marketing communication. Digital marketing communication is particularly important, given that the objective of marketing communication is to build consumer engagement.

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## Article Info

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## Study background

Facing the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) and the challenge of globalization, Indonesian brands have had difficulty competing with global brands. In 2016, Indonesia was home to 700 global brands, but only 55 local brands (Sukmana, 2016); these local brands grew by only 1% (Fitriani, 2015). This underscores the fact that Indonesian local brands have struggled in the face of globalization and the expansion of global brands.

The fashion industry is a leading sector in Indonesia's economy, contributing 18.1% of Indonesia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP); this was equivalent to US\$11 billion (Rusiawan, 2017); spending is similarly high in the sector (Budiman et al., 2013). However, the industry is dominated by global brands; local brands only receive the "leftovers" (Indonesian Agency for Creative Economy, 2018). This is exacerbated by limited trust in local brands, which are often viewed as being of poor quality. As such, local brands require appropriate strategies to endure the onslaught of global brands and thereby contribute more to the national economy (Saudale, 2016; Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2015).

Interestingly, however, at the same time there has been increased interest in local food products and household appliances (Isna, 2018), where consumers have shown increased interest in local industries (Nielsen, 2019). The success of local brands can be attributed mainly to local brands' ability to understand customers' desires and innovatively adapt to changing

community interests (Bella, 2018; Dirgantara, 2019).

Previous research has indicated that Indonesians perceive global brands as being of superior quality (Rahmi & Nurhayati, 2016; Sepryanto & Sukirno, 2014; Kussudyarsana, 2014). Such a tendency does not only exist in Indonesia; for example, Chinese and Indian consumers perceive global brands as being more fashionable and having higher quality (Chen et al., 2013; Kaur & Malik, 2015), while Croatian and Nigerian consumers perceive global brand as more luxurious owing to their country of origin (Krupka et al., 2014; Patrick et al., 2016).

Furthermore, several studies of local fashion industries have found that local brands can create events as an effective form of strategic marketing communication (Rahma, 2017). Kaur and Malik (2015), meanwhile, suggest that advertising is among the important tools for marketing local fashion brands. Such studies' perspectives contribute understandings of how local fashion brands develop marketing communication strategies to deal with competition from global brands. However, few studies have explored how local fashion brands have employed strategic marketing communication in Southeast Asia, let alone in Indonesia.

Fashion is part of the creative industry (Department of Culture, Media, and Sport, 1998), an industry that has significantly contributed to Indonesia's development. Several decrees and instructions have also been issued to regulate and promote the development of the creative

industry, which represented 7.13% of the country's GDP between 2010 and 2013. However, in its approach to the creative industry, Indonesia has employed patterns, strategies, and policies, that differ significantly from those of other developed countries (Fahmi et al, 2015). This may be attributed to the different social, political, and economic factors that affect creativity and entrepreneurship; where local brands are ignored in some Asian countries, elsewhere (such as in Bali, Yogyakarta, and Surakarta) they remain valued parts of cultural heritage (Indonesian Agency of Creative Economy, 2017; Fahmi et al., 2015).

In 2017, the Indonesian Agency for Creative Economy examined how local creative industries have built brand awareness. It found that, while local brands have created brand awareness in various ways, elements of locality (i.e. designs, words, jokes, fauna, etc.) are always present; furthermore, many brands have engaged with consumers using online marketing tools. However, this study examined a range of local brands, without considering elements of fashion, brand equity, and strategic marketing communication. As such, it may be concluded that no studies have adequately dealt with local fashion brands' use of strategic marketing communication in Asia, let alone in Indonesia. This article, thus, seeks to provide an alternative understanding of local fashion brands and how they create ideal strategic marketing communication.

This study seeks to provide perspective about how local fashion brands have endured in the midst of global competition. Strategic marketing communication is pivotal for local

fashion brands as it not only creates consumer awareness, but also builds good local brand equity. When local fashion brands are managed well by their founders/owners, they can act as 'heroes' promoting Indonesia's economic stabilization. This study thus provides an important foundation for understanding local fashion brand owners' choice of marketing communication strategies. Furthermore, by focusing on local brands from Yogyakarta, Indonesia a city known as a center of the nation's cultural and creative industries (Zudianto, 2008; Yogyakarta Office of Tourism, 2015) as its cases, this article offers new perspectives on strategic marketing communication within the fashion industry.

## Literature Review

In this section, researcher will briefly discuss some of the literature that is relevant to this study. This literature review will be thematically divided into three sections: i) strategic marketing communication; ii) local brand equity; and iii) millennials.

### 1. Strategic marketing communication

Communication strategies are important for building long-term brand equity (Ropo, 2009, p. 24). Brand equity increases a brand's position in consumers' minds and helps mitigate crises and negative issues. Applying the marketing communication model (Smith et al, 2003), this study focuses on strategic marketing communication, which is ideally integrated, controlled, and designed to send particular messages to consumers (Engel et al., 1994).

For ideal strategic marketing communication, a brand must use an effective strategic marketing communication model. A review of the literature shows that,

to develop effective strategic marketing communication, a brand should follow several steps:

**Table 1** Strategic marketing communication model

<b>Strategic marketing communication model</b>	<b>Kotler, 2003</b>	<b>Schultz &amp; Schultz, 2004</b>	<b>Percy, 2008</b>	<b>Kitchen &amp; Burgmann, 2010</b>
First step	Identify the target audience by setting a clear target audience.	Identify customers and prospects	Identify and select an appropriate target audience	Tactically coordinating marketing communication
Second step	Create a marketing communication objective to determine the desired response.	Valuate customers and prospect	Determine how that target audience makes products and brand decisions	Redefine the scope of marketing communication by gathering information from consumers, including evaluation and feedback
Third step	Create an effective message to get the attention, interest, desire, and action from the audience	Creating and delivering messages and incentives	Establish how the brand will be positioned within its marketing communication	Apply information and technology for marketing communication
Fourth step	Select tools of marketing communication	Estimate return on customer investment	Set communication objectives	Conduct financial and strategic integration to see ROI perspective as part of marketing communication evaluation
Fifth step	Pick the right source for sharing messages.	Conduct budgeting, allocation, and evaluation	Identify appropriate media options which are consistent with the communication objectives.	-

(Source: Kotler, 2003; Schultz & Schultz, 2004; Percy, 2008; Kitchen & Burgmann, 2010)

Based on those models, a model of strategic marketing communication was created for this research (Kotler, 2003; Schultz & Schultz, 2004; Percy, 2008; Kitchen & Burgmann, 2010). First, a brand must identify the target audience, as

understanding the target audience will allow a brand to better understand communication content and share a message (Kotler, 2003). Second, a brand needs to conduct consumer research to collect information, thereby creating a better model of marketing

communication that can attract consumer attention. Third, a brand must set a clear marketing communication objective, including to achieve awareness, knowledge, or equity (Keller, 2013; Aaker, 1996; Severi & Kwek, 2013; Amegbe, 2016).

Fourth, a brand must design an effective message to attract audiences' attention, interest, desire, and action. A marketing communication message must contain three elements: what to say (content), how to say it (structure), and how to say it symbolically (format). In its content, a brand must identify a theme that will create desired responses using rational, emotional, and moral appeals. Rational appeals mainly involve product quality, economy, value, or performance, while emotional appeals invoke the negative or positive emotions that can motivate purchase (love, joy, pride, humor, etc.). Finally, moral appeals invoke the audience's sense of right or wrong (Kotler, 2003).

Fifth, a brand must choose specific tools for marketing communication (Gurau, 2008; Tsikirayi et al. 2013). During this step, a brand should consider technology as part of its strategy because technology can affect marketing communication in two ways, i.e. through marketing and consumer perspectives (Kitchen & Burgmann, 2010). Sixth, a brand must select the source of its message, i.e. celebrities and endorsers. If a message is delivered from a highly credible source, it will be more persuasive. As such, many brands hire celebrity endorsers to deliver the message. Last, a brand must evaluate its marketing communication based on audience and financial feedback.

When discussing strategic marketing communication, one cannot ignore the concept of integrated marketing communication. Dimitriu (2012, p. 195) defines strategic communication as involving consistent "strategy, activities, themes, and messages, and the aim of obtaining legitimacy and support". Some evidence also indicates that integrated marketing communication (IMC) also offers a means of maximizing the impact of marketing communication on stakeholders and consumers (Mongkol, 2014; Ratriyana, 2018; Coupley, 2004). However, as part of strategic marketing communication, IMC refers to the use of various strategies and tactics to convey an effective message using various communication tools and disciplines, including advertising, direct marketing, public relations, personal selling, and sales promotions (Fill & Jamieson, 2006; Park & Ki, 2017; Percy, 2010).

First, advertising is part of marketing communication, used to share a message and create a specific effect on the audience (Moriarty et al., 2012). Several elements are important in advertising, i.e. brand, endorser, message. Second, marketing public relations helps a company establish relationships with the public, and thereby offers a marketing tool (Satawedini, 2005) that can be used to build a brand image. Marketing public relations focuses on long-term relationships, especially gaining customer feedback, creating one-to-one interactions, providing customer service, etc. (Plessis et al., 2006).

Third, direct marketing communication is designed to motivate consumers' short term responses and have immediate effects. It sends messages using a consumer

database to relate directly with the audience and create interactive spaces with audiences using catalogs, direct mail, telemarketing, and direct response advertising/new media. Direct marketing communication is intended to establish relationships (Moriarty et al., 2012). Fourth, personal selling is intended to create direct contact with consumers, thereby providing an opportunity for companies to modify their basic messages and address specific concerns (Percy, 2010, p. 136). It involves two-way interactions between salespersons and customers, which usually leads to purchase decisions. A salesperson must understand target customers' attitude towards the brand. Last, sales promotions are traditionally used to provide incentives i.e. discounts, prize, refunds, rebates, samples, sponsorship, events, loyalty programs, etc. to customers in order to incite purchases (Percy, 2010).

Such forms of marketing communication may be conducted through traditional media (i.e. television, radio, newspaper) or digital media (i.e. website, social media, blog). These two types of media have high levels of interactivity, affecting consumers' perceptions of advertisements (Zhang & Wang, 2005). Particularly popular in recent years is digital media, and as such brands can harness the power of the internet to conduct digital marketing communication (Stokes, 2014, p. 18). Brands can also interact with audiences, easily exchanging, generating, collaborating, or sharing content with multiple individuals at the same time (Chris, 2013). Digital platforms thus offer brands a means of developing themselves and inviting audience engagement.

## 2. Local Brand Equity

The term local brand is typically used to refer to a brand from specific countries or areas, which is created to fulfill the needs and wants of local markets. Usually, a local brand shows uniqueness and originality, thereby becoming a source of local pride (Schuiling & Kapferer, 2004; Dimofte et al., 2008; Ozsomer, 2012). To assert and maintain itself, a local brand must create a specific quality, image, and personality to build good relationships with consumers (Schuiling & Kapferer, 2004; Harun et al., 2010; Zareei & Ashtiani, 2015). Based on their origin and ownership, local brands can be classified into four categories (Tjiptono, 2005):

- a. Original local brands: brands from a local country and owned by local people.
- b. Quasi-Local Brands: brands from a local country but owned by foreign companies.
- c. Acquired Local Brands: brands from other countries but owned by some local individuals/companies.
- d. Foreign Brands: brands owned by foreign people.

Several elements make local brands significant for consumers, i.e. iconicity, personality, nature, and quality. Consumers are more likely to appreciate local brands because they understand the process (Nielsen, 2016). Some local brands become local icons, and thus consumers choose these brands because of their originality (Harun et al., 2006; Ozsomer, 2012; Nielsen, 2016). As local icons, local brands invest themselves in building strong relationships with consumers, while still maintaining product quality (Schuiling & Kapferer,

2004). Local brands can thus survive if they have brand personality, trust, value and are identified as "down-to-earth" (Harun et al., 2010; Schuiling & Kapferer, 2004).

Brand equity is another major factor that is considered by consumers. It may be understood as a combination of several aspects, such as brand awareness, quality, association and loyalty (Keller, 2013; Aaker, 1996; Severi & Kwek, 2013; Amegbe, 2016). First, brand awareness refers to consumers' ability to identify a brand (Subramaniam et al., 2014), which affects consumers' perceptions of the brand. In building brand equity, it is thus important to impact consumers' cognitive memory, thereby ensuring that the brand is more memorable. Consumers are willing to pay more for brands of which they are aware, and are also more likely to build positive memories through advertising from familiar brands.

Second, brand quality refers to consumers' perceptions of a product's relative superiority, as well as its ability to provide more satisfaction compared to other alternatives (Amegbe, 2016). Consumers will buy products that they believe will benefit them more (Bray, 2008; Saleem et al., 2015), and they are more likely to purchase it again if they feel satisfied. To convince consumers of a brand's ability to fulfill their needs and expectations, brand quality must thus be communicated to consumers. Attractive promotion as well as other consumer interactions is an important part of increasing consumers' perceptions of brand quality and dealing with competition (Amegbe, 2016).

Third, brand association (sometimes also known for brand image) is another tool for making consumers acknowledge a product. It is also linked with consumers' ability to recognize or recall a brand based on associated images (Keller, 2013), as well as the extent to which they are accepted by consumers and reflect their feelings (Severi & Kwek, 2013). Brands can create strong associations with quality and value to remain competitive, using their brand image as a quick reference for consumers. According to Keller (in Hamidi et al., 2010), brand image refers to the perceptions of brands held in consumers' memories. Brand association, both functional and symbolic, make it easier to identify 'who they are, who they wish to be and/or how they wish to be seen'.

Last, brand loyalty refers to the trust consumers develop for products after buying, using, and being satisfied by a product. This satisfaction builds emotional bonds and entices consumers to make repeat purchases (Kumara & Ashan, 2004; Amegbe, 2016). Keeping consumer loyalty is more profitable for brands than continuously finding new consumers; not only are loyal consumers more likely to recommend a brand to friends and family, but they are also less likely to be distracted by another brand (leading to lower promotion expenses). Brand loyalty can be affected by direct contact with consumers (i.e. trials and samples) and with non-direct contact (i.e. advertising and word-of-mouth) (Keller, 2013; Amegbe, 2016). All of these are identified with high equity (Aaker, 1996; Amegbe, 2016).

### 3. Millennials

The millennial generation (commonly abbreviated "millennials") refer to persons who were born between 1981 until 2000, who have been targeted by marketers around the world (Howe & Strauss, 2003; Sun, 2011; Moriarty et al., 2012; McCrindle, 2010; UNIDO, 2013). Generally, millennials have grown up with computers, emails, and cellular phones, and as such better understand technology than previous generations (Len, 1997; Morton, 2002). Up to 81% of millennials use social media every day (Belch & Belch, 2013); in Indonesia, 87.45% of millennials use Facebook, 69.21% use Instagram, and 41.31% use Twitter (Jakpat,

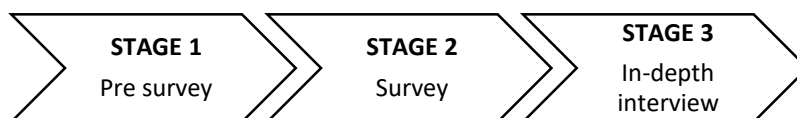
2016). The tastes of this "digital generation" or "net generation" are thus shaped primarily by social media advertisements, and they are unattracted to brands that do not use digital advertising (Androitdigital, 2014).

Millennials are likewise more concerned by environmental and social issues than older generations. As such, they are sensitive to environmental controversies, a fact exacerbated by them being more influenced by friends and television rather than the brand itself. It is very important for brands to access millennials' friends, families, and communities, who significantly affect how millennials think about brands (McKinsey, 2019).

### Methodology

Using an explanatory sequential design (Cameron, 2009; Berman, 2017;

Bowen et al., 2017), this article applies a mixed methods approach in several stages:



**Diagram 1. Research stages**

(Source: Researcher's data)

#### 1. Quantitative study

This article applies a quantitative approach to: i) identify top-of-mind local fashion brands in Yogyakarta; ii) measure the level of local fashion brand equity; iii) identify each brand equity's attributes and development of brand equity. A pre-survey was used to identify the top-of-mind local fashion brands, while a survey was used to collect data about millennials' perceptions of brand equity and understand how different

attributes contribute to local brand equity (De Vaus, 1991; Moriarty et al., 2012). Local brand equity was explored using a quantitative-descriptive approach, producing findings that can contribute to planning and decision-making (Isaac & Michael, 1985).

Convenience sampling was used in this research to achieve the ideal target; respondents were then selected randomly (Sue & Ritter, 2012; Martono, 2010). This quantitative study targeted millennials, who



are generally more aware and independent in purchasing products (Kowalska, 2012; Hayta, 2013; Aday & Yener, 2014). Yogyakarta City, the site of the research, is home to 301,000 persons aged 19–24 (Central of Statistic Bureau Yogyakarta Province, 2017). As such, according to the Slovin formulation, with a 5% margin of error and 95% confidence level (Sugiyono, 2006), the sample should include at least 400 respondents.

### **1.1. Pre-Survey**

The pre-survey questionnaire was distributed online in May 2018. To gain insights into top-of-mind local fashion brands, a total of 504 valid questionnaires were processed. These questionnaires identified three top-of-mind local fashion brands: Dowa, Amazara, and Dagadu. Dowa is a local company that produces handbags from natural materials; Amazara produces stylish but affordable shoes; and Dagadu is known for producing t-shirts. These three top-of-mind local fashion brands were thus included in next stages, i.e. survey and interview, which involved the same respondents.

### **1.2 Survey**

The survey questionnaire was disseminated online in June 2018 to the same respondents as the pre-survey questionnaires. Of the 504 total questionnaires distributed, only 488 questionnaires were valid and processed. Validity, reliability, descriptive statistics tests were done to examine local brand equity (Priyatno, 2012; Uyanto, 2006). The Likert scale was used to differentiate between various levels of measurements. Reliability testing was then

conducted, finding a coefficient Alpha Cronbach of 0.805 (indicating reliability). Validity testing subsequently found that all questions are valid ( $r \geq 0.082$ ), with 5% significance.

## **2. Qualitative study**

Using a qualitative approach, meanwhile, this study investigated the strategic marketing communication used by local brands to develop local brand equity. This qualitative approach was used to give deeper meaning to previous data, especially data regarding culture and social action. Through its combination of qualitative and quantitative data, the researcher tried to obtain a native perspective (Jensen, 2008).

### **2.1. In-depth interview**

In February 2019, in-depth interviews were conducted to obtain data on three local fashion brands: Dagadu, Dowa, and Amazara. The researcher attempted to conduct in-depth interviews with these brands' CEOs (chief executive officer), founders, co-founders, and/or research and development staff. However, the researcher was only able to collect data only from Dagadu's CEO and Amazara's head of research and development. Unfortunately, Dowa rejected the researcher's requests for interviews several times, and as such this study could not explore Dowa's strategies; furthermore, as interviews were conducted as a continuation of findings from the quantitative study, Dowa could not be replaced by another brand.

## Results and Discussion

This section is divided into two parts: quantitative and qualitative. This is intended to help readers better understand what the researcher sought to achieve.

### 1. Quantitative study

The pre-survey was conducted to help the researcher identify local fashion brands with high levels of awareness amongst millennial consumers. It identified

several local fashion brands with high awareness, including Lulu Lutfi Labibi (2.08%), Hamzah Batik (4.17%), Rumah Warna (6.25%), and Abekani (8.33%). This study, however, only focused on the three local fashion brands with the highest levels of awareness: Dagadu (56.25%), Dowa (27.8%), and Amazara (22.92%). A demographic profile of respondents is shown in the table below:

**Table 2** Profile of respondents

Profile of Respondent		Percent
Location	Yogyakarta	98.20
	Other	1.40
Sex	Male	30.10
	Female	68.90
Age	19	1.80
	20	7.40
	21	9.2
	22	23
	23	20.30
	24	16.60
	25	8.60
	26	4.90
Occupation	27	8.20
	Student	73.6
	Worker	16.6
	Entrepreneur	4.7

(Source: research data, 2018)

This profile shows that 68.9% of respondents were female and 30.10% were male. The majority of respondents were

between the ages of 23 and 24 (20.30% and 16.60%, respectively). Reflecting this age range, most respondents were students.

**Table 3** Profile of respondents

Source of information	Dowa Percent	Amazara Percent	Dagadu Percent
Magazine	13.5	8.0	5.9
Peer, i.e. friends and family	56.6*	44.5*	26.4*
Television	2.3	2.4	0.4
Facebook	4.3	5.5	5.1
Twitter	0.2	0.2	0.2
Website	1.2	3.9	7.2
YouTube	0.4	1.0	1.0
Other social media	10.2	19.1	33

(Source: research data, 2018)

The researcher also asked respondents to indicate their source of information about local fashion brands. Most received information from their friends and family. Social media was also an important source of consumer knowledge.

The researcher used the Likert scale (from 5 [highest] to 1 [lowest]) to determine the brand equity of three brands. The scale range was 3.2 for each level.

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Scale Range} &= \frac{n(m-1)}{m} \\
 &= \frac{4(5-1)}{5} \\
 &= 3.2
 \end{aligned}$$

The data found that Amazara has the highest mean statistic (M= 12.93, SD= 1.47), followed by Dowa (M= 12.55, SD= 1.56) and Dagadu (M= 12.54, SD= 1.42). Details are provided in the below table:

**Table 4** Summary of brand equity

	N Statistic	Mean Statistic	Std. Deviation Statistic	Skewness		Kurtosis	
				Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Dagadu	377	12.5491*	1.56026	-.111	.126	-.580	.251
Dowa	333	12.5526*	1.42939	-.511	.134	-.016	.266
Amazara	373	12.9383*	1.47887	-.405	.126	-.678	.252

\*) Scale range for brand equity: very low= 3.3 – 6.5; low= 6.6 – 9.8; middle = 9.9 – 13.1; good = 13.2 – 16.4; very good= 16.5 – 19.7 (scale range 3.2)

(Source: research data, 2018)

This study found that all three local fashion brands had mid-level brand equity (scale range 9.9 – 13.1). This is critical, as local fashion brands may be unable to compete with foreign ones; a stronger brand equity would improve survivability.

Further, using mean analysis, the researcher tried to determine the attributes i.e. brand awareness, brand quality, brand association, and brand loyalty that strongly affect brand equity. A scale range of 1.6 was found for each level.

**Table 5** Mean analysis of brand awareness, quality, association, and loyalty

Local Fashion Brand	Brand Awareness	Brand Quality	Brand Association	Brand Loyalty	Brand Equity
Dagadu	3.09	1.36	4.23*	2.88	12.54
Dowa	2.95	2.13	4.52*	2.86	12.55
Amazara	3.69*	2.31	4.14*	2.70	12.93

\*) Scale range for brand awareness, quality, association and loyalty: very low= 0.8 – 1.6; low= 1.7 – 2.5; middle = 2.6 – 3.4; strong = 3.5 – 4.3; very strong= 4.4 – 5.2 (scale range 1.6)

(Source: research data, 2018)

From Table 5, it can be seen that brand association scored highly (4.14–4.52). The researcher asked respondents about several unique brand attributes, including outlet location, tagline, and website, finding that brand recognition was good or very good. The lowest mean was found in brand quality, which affected brand loyalty. As local fashion brands were identified with low and very low levels of quality (1.36–2.31), it is essential to improve brand quality before making any other changes.

To better understand these findings, a qualitative study was used to understand how brands manage their strategic marketing communication and create brand equity.

## 2. Qualitative study

The researcher sought to use a qualitative approach to better understand the findings and draw conclusions about local fashion brands' strategic marketing communication. Based on in-depth interviews with representatives from two local fashion brands, the following findings were made:

### 2.1. Identify the target audience

For local fashion brands, it is first necessary to understand the target audience. This would facilitate the designing and sharing of the brand's concepts. Both local fashion brands have the same target audience: millennials (i.e. persons who are between 18 and 35 years old). This market is attractive because of its size and spending tendencies, as well as its awareness of products and its independent income/savings (Kowalska, 2012; Hayta, 2013; Aday & Yener, 2014).

However, these brands target different segments of the millennial market. Amazara explained that it specifically targets 'modest but smart women'. This focus on 'modest' women over 'beautiful' and 'attractive' women is interesting. It suggests that Amazara focuses on lower-middle class women who want to be stylish even with a limited budget, as reflected in the tagline 'Affordably Stylish'. This is a positive advantage, one that should be maintained because a brand with a good personality can be trusted by consumers (Harun et al., 2010).

Dagadu, meanwhile, seeks to sell souvenirs to consumers. As such, it has a clear target audience: 'domestic and foreign tourists who are traveling to Yogyakarta'. Although this target audience is good, it is not as specific as Amazara's. Dagadu must show an identity and brand personality that is relevant to their consumers.

## **2.2. Consumer research**

Both local fashion brands were aware of the need to conduct consumer research to gain insight into what consumers really want. However, these brands use different procedures. Between 2000 and 2015, Dagadu conducted studies to understand consumer trends. Meanwhile, Amazara has continued to maintain an active research and development division.

*" Yes... we conducted research to understand the profile of our current market. Their design interest is now modern, minimalist, and simple"* (CEO, Dagadu, 2019).

Both brands believe that research is important for understanding what consumers think about their brands and how they can innovate. Through research, these brands can make findings that are crucial for product development. For example, Dagadu decided to launch a sub-brand called DGD after finding that consumers wanted a younger, simpler, and more monochromic design.

## **2.3. Marketing communication objectives**

Both local fashion brands have used marketing communication to gain brand engagement, and thereby create word-of-mouth (which is important for a local

fashion brand). To achieve this objective, Amazara and Dagadu have tried to befriend consumers using several marketing communication tools (which will be explained below). However, this objective is insufficiently clear, as it does not mention any specific or quantifiable numbers or deadlines.

"Whatever it takes, give it to the customer" (Head of Research and Development, Amazara, 2019).

Both brands have also described their business objectives. Dagadu seeks to provide unique and iconic t-shirt souvenirs, while Amazara aims to meet women's demand for affordable clothing.

## **2.4. Media content design**

Both local fashion brands have different ways of creating messages or designs. Amazara does not have a creative division. Rather, ideas come up during monthly meeting wherein employees share ideas. Amazara is a dynamic company that follows and adapts to industry trends. Only three things do not change: the font, pink color, and tagline "Affordably Stylish". Amazara's products are not designed to resemble local or traditional designs, but rather mimic Western designs. This contradicts Cayla and Eckhardt's argument (in Ing et al., 2012) that local brands are supposed to present themselves as local products and be easily identified as part of local tradition. Amazara has recognized that millennials want to look stylish without really considering locality, reflecting the Kapferer's argument (in Dogerlioglu-Demir & Tansuhaj, 2011) that young consumers

are interested in using global brands to increase their social status.

Dagadu, meanwhile, focuses on its creative division and Yogyakarta culture. Selling unique, attractive, and artsy products, it has become an icon of the city over the past 25 years. It has strictly maintained its concepts and designs, rather than dynamically adapting to new trends; unlike Amazara, which changes its concept every year, Dagadu has only changed its concept twice (in 2000 and 2015). As such, Dagadu must remember that consumers are very dynamic, and similar dynamicity is necessary to maintain brand value (Ropo, 2009).

"This (competition) is not about who came first, but who is going to be in the right place and time" (CEO, Dagadu, 2019).

Using rational and emotional appeals in their message content, Dagadu and Amazara have successfully built attractive brand images and visual identities that they convey to consumers, respectively being identified as having local and modern designs. Young consumers can easily relate to designs, triggering positive responses. While Amazara primarily focuses on rational values, i.e. quality, economy, value, and performance, Dagadu emphasizes emotional values (especially through local jokes and wordplay).

## **2.5. Marketing communication tools**

Both local fashion brands aim to create brand engagement with consumers, and use both traditional and digital marketing communication tools to achieve this objective. Amazara, which began as an

online shop in 2015, provides 24-hour customer service and a 30-day product guarantee. Consumers are "treated like queens" at Amazara, being able to complain about products at any time and return products for any reason within 30 days; they will also receive vouchers from the customer service team. Amazara perceived customer satisfaction as important for online shops, and by providing such services can ensure that consumers do not hesitate before buying products.

Dagadu, meanwhile, began as an offline store but embraced the internet as a new opportunity for building customer engagements. When Dagadu built a new building (the Yogyatorium) in 2015, it intended the premise as a creative space for local communities. The Yogyatorium includes a performance hall, coffee shop, seating areas, etc. Consumers are thus not only able to shop, but also to relax and take pictures. Every week, a different community holds its events at the Yogyatorium.

Personal selling is an important tool for both local brands. Amazara's consumers are fully supported by online customer service, and treated as queens who deserve the greatest convenience. Dagadu, although it does not have online customer, operates an offline customer service called Garda Depan, which employs 50 part-time university students; as this service is popular amongst local students, it also offers soft promotion for Dagadu. By ensuring that customers get the best experience, local brands can establish stellar reputations (Amegbe, 2016).

Unlike Amazara, which relies solely on digital marketing tools, Dagadu combines

several traditional marketing tools, including radio, billboards and customer events. It finds that, by creating good customer engagement through public activities both during public holidays such as Eid al-Fitr and Christmas and regular community events it can ensure customer loyalty. This is essential, as creating consumer engagement is one objective of marketing communication.

### **2.6. Select the source of information**

Both local fashion brands rely on everyday people as their most significant source of information. Rather than hire celebrities, they ask real consumers to share information, trusting that consumers will promote their brands to other potential consumers and create word-of-mouth. Amazara focuses on e-wom (electronic word-of-mouth), while Dagadu depends on residents of Yogyakarta to spread information about their product. Amazara recognizes customers by providing vouchers to people who review their products honestly, while Dagadu creates regular community events. Post-purchase communication between consumers and/or potential consumers particularly recommendations and referrals have been proven to be a main factor behind purchasing decisions (Stokes et al, 2002).

*"Our consumers like user-generated content, real content from other customers with which they can relate more. So we ask them to post pictures of their (Amazara) shoes and give honest reviews—not good reviews, but honest reviews. We will repost, and they can get free shoes"* (Head of Research and Development, Amazara, 2019).

### **2.7. Program evaluation and feedback**

Both local fashion brands conduct research to measure consumer satisfaction and deal with consumers' concerns about product quality. In Dagadu's case, many consumers have identified their products as having low quality. The company, however, believes that it produces the best quality shirts with the most uniquely 'Yogyakartan' design, and worries that quality concerns have emerged because consumers have bought fake products. For years, Dagadu has been dealing with counterfeiting. Citing concern that fraudulent activity would have negative long-term effects, the company ultimately took a counterfeiter to court in 2013.

*"I worry about image. Many people know about Dagadu, but they might buy fake products. Our loss is bigger than that."* (CEO, Dagadu, 2019)

In the case of Amazara, quality concerns emerged after the company increased the prices of its products. Consumers did not realize that this was intended to improve product quality after a series of product returns. In order to ameliorate its relationship with its customers, Amazara offered them vouchers and free products; in exchange, former critics were expected to post a product review. Amazara believed that, after these consumers recognized the quality of their products, they would withdraw their complains. Such an offer was not made available to loyal consumers, who were seen as recognizing Amazara's quality and affordability.

*"Some netizens said that our prices are too expensive now. Our strategy, every time we found that kind of netizen, we gave them a new product so they could compare the old and new products. After that, feedback improved; they said that the quality is higher now."* (Head of Research and Development, Amazara, 2019).

## **Conclusion**

### **1. Developing good local brand equity**

This study has found that local fashion brands are in a critical position, as they have only mid-level brand equity. It is therefore important to strengthen brand equity (Keller, 2013; Aaker, 1996; Severi & Kwek, 2013; Amegbe, 2016). More specifically, although the quantitative study found that Amazara has the highest level of brand equity ( $M= 12.93, SD= 1.47$ ), its scale range remains middling; Dowa and Dagadu are in similar positions. As such, these companies need to increase their brand equity and thereby influence consumers' purchasing habits (Keller, 2013; Aaker, 1996; Severi & Kwek, 2013; Amegbe, 2016).

All three of the local brands discussed here were founded and remain owned by local people (Tjiptono, 2005). Although they show uniqueness in their designs, it is also important for them to create high quality to both attract and retain consumers; only in this manner can they address perceived quality problems, which are a primary reason for Indonesian consumers' distrust of local brands (Saudale, 2016; Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2015).

As local brands compete against international ones, it is important for them to improve their (perceived) brand quality. The quantitative survey found that consumers viewed these brands as having low and/or very low quality levels; Dagadu has had problems with counterfeiting, while Amazara has had difficulty balancing quality and affordability. Improving (perceived) brand quality is thus necessary to upgrade brand equity, which in turn will buttress how brands are viewed in times of crisis (Ropo, 2009). As Bray (2008) and Saleem et al. (2015) have mentioned, consumers buy what they choose to buy, usually because of product quality; as such, it is necessary to improve brand quality before making any other efforts to ameliorate brand equity.

After improving quality, it is also important for local fashion brands to build their own brand personality, i.e. to incorporate local values and present brand origins to consumers (Nielsen, 2016; Harun et al., 2010). This personality can be communicated through brand associations, which the quantitative study has shown has the highest mean of all brand equity attributes. Brand association, thus, has a more significant effect on existing brand equity than other attributes.

Brand association makes it easier for consumers to recognize a brand (Keller, 2013), and thus enables companies to remain competitive (Sever & Kwek, 2013). Local fashion brands could incorporate local traditions and brand origins as their core values (Schuiling & Kapferer, 2004; Nielsen, 2016; Harun et al., 2006; Ozsomer,



2012). Local brands need to integrate local values to succeed, developing a sense of local pride while still remaining stylish and fashionable. This has already occurred to some extent; Dagadu uses local jokes in its designs, while Amazara conceptually links itself with affordability.

## **2. Creating ideal strategic marketing communication for local fashion brands**

After identifying the strengths and weaknesses of local brands' equity, the researcher tried to elaborate on the results through a qualitative study. It found, first, that local fashion brands are able to identify their target markets and fulfill consumers' need for local souvenirs and everyday outfits (Schuiling & Kapferer, 2004; Dimofte et al., 2008; Ozsomer, 2012). When brands can meet consumers' expectations, it can create emotional bonding and consumer loyalty (Kumara & Ashan, 2004; Amegbe, 2016).

By having specific audiences, local brands can more easily create plans and choose channels for approaching their consumers. Local fashion brands target fashionable 18–35-year-old consumers. However, as millennials are more concerned about environmental and social issues (such as locality), locality should be further incorporated into the brand value. By doing so, these brands could promote consumer pride (McKinsey, 2019).

Regardless of brand size, research is essential. Brands must evaluate themselves continuously, as complacency is detrimental to brand sustainability. Feedback from customers can provide brands with good evaluation, providing them with the

information they need to further develop themselves. This study found that quality significantly influences consumer choice (Zareei & Ashtiani, 2015; Bray, 2008; Saleem et al., 2015); as such, local brands must ensure that consumers receive the best-quality products and recognize the effect of quality on consumer satisfaction (Amegbe, 2016).

Importantly, however, Dagadu and Amazara use different approaches to marketing communication; the former is very traditional, while the latter focuses only on digital media. Owing to different social, political, and economic factors, all of which affect creativity and entrepreneurship, there is no ideal marketing communication tool. As such, it is important to ascertain the digital and traditional media communication tools that are most appropriate for communicating brand information and building consumer trust (Amegbe, 2016). As such, all brands must interact with consumers and maintain positive relationships (De Chernatony & Drury, 2006).

Approaching local people and communities might be ideal for local fashion brands, as doing so will enable them to quickly spread information and create word-of-mouth. As consumers trust word-of-mouth from local/organic reviewers more than celebrity endorsements, it is important to engage local communities and promote brand development. Getting honest reviews from consumers will help brands create trust (De Chernatony & Drury, 2006).

### **3. Effect of integrated marketing communication on word-of-mouth**

All three local fashion brands use marketing communication to raise consumer awareness. However, Amazara has the highest level of brand awareness, which might be attributed to its use of digital media for advertising; digital media is extremely popular among the young, fresh and dynamic millennials it targets (Stokes, 2014; Chris, 2013). Digital marketing offers a significant means of communicating with audiences, especially millennials, and thereby creating brand value (Gurau, 2008; Tsikirayi et al., 2013). Both Dagadu and Amazara use real consumers and community recommendations to ensure they can optimally reach their target market. Consumers find real reviews from everyday people more trustworthy than those from celebrities; this is evidenced by the quantitative study, which shows that consumers most commonly refer to peers (family and friends) when choosing products.

To reach millennials, local fashion brands must design specific messages and embrace unique styles. Local brands may be very Western, simply following the newest trends, or maintain local cultural stylings. So long as they make their choices based on consumers' wants and needs as identified through consumer research both concepts are valid. Local brands recognize that consumers are dynamic, with their tastes changing very quickly; as such, memory is an important element of brand value (Ropo, 2009). As consumers trust their peers, brands must also approach specific groups and communities as part of their strategic

marketing communication (McKinsey, 2019).

However, it is important to remember that marketing communication must not only create awareness, but also build engagement. Without consumer engagements, local brands cannot guarantee their survival or create word-of-mouth. As seen here, local fashion brands can use digital media to create engagement and word-of-mouth among millennials. Digital media is very important, as millennials consider social media to influence brand choice most significantly (Androitdigital, 2014; Zhang & Wang, 2005; Stokes, 2014; Chris, 2013).

Furthermore, local fashion brands have also used personal selling as a significant marketing communication tool; Amazara provides consumers with online customer service, while Dagadu uses 50 part-time employees to promote its brand. This personal selling provides companies with the opportunity to directly contact customers and modify their basic messages depending on audiences' concerns and needs (Percy, 2010). With two-way communication, brands can create good public perception, improve brand quality, and eventually influence audiences to purchase their products.

### **4. Practical implications and limitations**

To survive in the current era of global competition, local brands must create quality, engagement, and personality with the help of salespersons and digital media. The local fashion brands examined here still have mid-level brand equity, meaning that they require significant work to improve

brand equity. As quality is the weakest equity attribute, it is essential for local fashion brands to increase quality in their efforts to improve brand equity. This may be done through product development (i.e. by changing materials, product sources, locations, stores, etc.), or by improving their self-representation by presenting themselves as having good quality and by creating customer satisfaction. Local fashion brands' strategic marketing communication, thus, should focus on brand quality.

After brand quality is improved, local fashion brands can conduct customer engagement to create good consumer relations, thereby promoting word-of-mouth. Choosing the right opinion leaders is thus an important part of digital marketing communication and reaching millennial audiences. It is also essential for local fashion brands to build brand personality by incorporating local values, traditions, and brand origins in their efforts to reach audiences. Such efforts have already been undertaken by the local fashion brand association, which has used taglines,

designs, and jokes that reflect local values and traditions. Where local fashion brands do not incorporate local values into their products, such an approach should be attempted, as doing so would not only improve consumers' pride in local brands but also provide distinguishing features.

The main limitation of this research is the relative lack of data involved in the quantitative and qualitative study. Ideally, a large number of local brands should be explored, with significant persons interviewed to gain insight. As such, it is necessary for further research to investigate more types of local brands, as doing so may offer new and different perspectives. Although quantitative research may be foundational, it can be enhanced by using experimental research to test the effects of digital marketing communication. Furthermore, as word-of-mouth an important factor in the creation of brand engagement has received little discussion herein, a future project could productively explore word-of-mouth as an aspect of strategic marketing communication.

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