

Research Article

## Positioning Strategy Selera Aceh As Top-Of-Mind Aceh Noodles Brands In Bandung

Dinda Putri Zuniar<sup>1\*</sup>, Gallang Perdana Dalimunthe<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Master of Business Administration, School of Business and Management, Institut Teknologi Bandung, Indonesia; email: [dindaputrz28@gmail.com](mailto:dindaputrz28@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>Master of Business Administration, School of Business and Management, Institut Teknologi Bandung, Indonesia; email: [gallang.dalimunthe@sbm-itb.ac.id](mailto:gallang.dalimunthe@sbm-itb.ac.id)

\* Corresponding Author: [dindaputrz28@gmail.com](mailto:dindaputrz28@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** The Acehnese noodle market in Bandung has become increasingly competitive as more regional specialty brands enter the city's culinary scene. Selera Aceh is one of the local players offering Acehnese noodles in a café-style setting but has not yet become the top-of-mind brand when consumers think of "Aceh noodles in Bandung". This study aims to analyse how Selera Aceh can strengthen its brand positioning to reach top-of-mind status by identifying key factors that shape consumer perceptions, assessing the current brand equity based on Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model, and formulating suitable positioning and marketing improvement strategies. A qualitative case-study approach was used, drawing on in-depth interviews with existing Selera Aceh customers from diverse backgrounds. Thematic analysis was conducted and the resulting themes were mapped onto the CBBE dimensions Brand Salience, Brand Performance, Brand Imagery, Brand Judgements, Brand Feelings, and Brand Resonance while Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) principles were applied to translate the insights into practical strategic directions. The findings reveal six key themes. Authentic and good Acehnese taste is the main driver of visits and repeat visits, as customers describe the noodles as flavourful, rich in spices, and comparable to eating in Aceh. A cozy, homey, and memorable dining experience further strengthens emotional attachment, while prices are perceived as affordable yet café-like, creating strong value-for-money judgements. Brand awareness is built through multiple channels that is street-level visibility, food-delivery applications, and social media supported by promotions and community-based activities that generate excitement and a sense of belonging. At the same time, respondents highlight brand gaps in visual identity, Acehnese cultural cues, and communication that Acehnese noodles are suitable for all Bandung consumers, not only people from Aceh or Sumatra.

**Keywords:** positioning strategy, Customer-Based Brand Equity, integrated marketing communication, Acehnese noodles, brand equity, Selera Aceh, Bandung.

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### 1. Introduction

In recent years, the culinary industry in Indonesia has experienced rapid growth. One trend that stands out is the increasing public interest in regional culinary treasures. This spirit of exploration of specialties from various parts of the archipelago is in line with the increasingly open access to information, domestic tourism, and social media trends that encourage people to try new flavors that are authentic and distinctive.

One of the cities that has high enthusiasm for the culinary world is Bandung. Known as a creative and dynamic city, Bandung is even dubbed as the "Culinary City" because of the diversity and richness of its food choices that are a special attraction for locals and tourists.

According to data from the Bandung City Department of Culture and Tourism (Disbudpar Kota Bandung, 2021), as cited in the Amendment to the Strategic Plan of the Bandung City Culture and Tourism Office (2019–2023), the culinary sub-sector ranks as the second largest creative economy sector in the city, with a total of 338 businesses. This indicates the high level of interest and participation of Bandung residents in culinary-related enterprises.

The table below shows the number of creative economy businesses across different sub-sectors in Bandung:

**Table 1.** Number of Creative Economy Industries in Bandung City by Sub-Sector

Creative Economy Subsector	Total
Applications and Games	69
Architecture	28
Interior Design	12
Product Design	45
Fashion	530
Film, Animation, and Video	51
Photography	29
Graphic Design	30
Crafts (Kriya)	308
Culinary	338
Music	33
Publishing	61
Advertising	16
Performing Arts	7
Fine Arts	28
Television and Radio	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,590</b>

(Source: *Disbudpar Bandung City, 2021. Taken from the Amendment to the Strategic Plan of the Bandung City Culture and Tourism Office (2019-2023).*)

Based on data obtained from the amended Strategic Plan of the Bandung City Culture and Tourism Office (2019-2023), the creative economy contributes 16.96% to Bandung's GRDP, with the culinary sector being one of the leading sub-sectors. This confirms that the culinary sector has a strategic role in the city's economic growth as well as great potential in developing businesses based on regional specialties.

Bandung's consumption culture is very attached to new food trends, including specialties from other regions in Indonesia. This creates a great opportunity for the entry of the archipelago's culinary specialties into the Bandung market.

This open consumption behavior of Bandung residents has encouraged the presence and development of various regional culinary products in the city. Culinary businesses offering dishes from Padang, Makassar, Manado, and even Papua have found their loyal markets in Bandung, proving that local consumers are not bound only to Sundanese cuisine. Instead, they are known for their culinary curiosity, willingness to try new regional specialties, and appreciation for authentic taste experiences from other parts of the country.

The multicultural and youthful character of Bandung's population—consisting largely of students, creative workers, and tourists—creates an inclusive culinary landscape. Regional cuisines that are rich in flavor and distinct in character have a high chance of being accepted and even celebrated. One of those regional cuisines that has been increasingly welcomed is Acehese cuisine.

Acehnese cuisine is part of the culinary wealth of the archipelago that has the potential to continue to be developed. The richness of spices, cooking techniques, and unique flavors make Acehese cuisine not only attractive to people from Aceh, but also able to attract consumers from outside the region. In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of restaurants, shops and food stalls serving Acehese specialties in various major cities in Indonesia, including Bandung. This phenomenon shows that the public is increasingly open and accepting the presence of Acehese specialties as part of a variety of daily culinary choices.

This acceptance is also shown through the high interest in Acehese dishes on online ordering platforms, positive reviews given by customers on social media, and the emergence of several Acehese Mie brands that began to develop and have loyal customers outside Aceh. In Bandung, for example, the presence of Acehese noodles is not only a culinary alternative, but has formed its own market segment. This can be seen from the existence of several Aceh Noodle brands that have been operating for more than a decade and are able to maintain their existence in the midst of a competitive culinary industry.

In recent years, Acehese cuisine has shown significant growth outside its home region, including in Bandung. This is reflected in the growing number of stalls and restaurants serving Acehese dishes in the city. This development is supported by the characteristics of Bandung people who are open to culinary from various regions, as well as the increasing trend of culinary exploration. Acehese cuisine, with its strong flavors and distinctive use of spices, offers an interesting differentiation compared to other local cuisines. This creates a great opportunity for the development of Acehese cuisine in Bandung, both in terms of business and preservation of the archipelago's culinary culture.

In addition, culinary platforms such as PergiKuliner list some of the best Aceh cuisine eateries in Bandung, including Kedai Aceh Cie Rasa Loom, Waroeng Atjeh, and Dapur Aceh, which are spread across different areas of the city. The presence of these places shows that Acehese cuisine has been well received by the people of Bandung and has the potential to continue growing.

With the increasing exposure and acceptance of Acehese cuisine, it is important to continue to develop a brand that carries this culinary identity in a consistent and strategic manner. Aceh Noodles as one of the flagship menus of Aceh cuisine has great potential to be developed further, especially in the Bandung market which is known as a city with active culinary dynamics and receptive to new flavors. Of all Aceh's culinary varieties, the most recognizable and highly appealing in the culinary market outside the region is Aceh Noodle.

Given the open-minded nature of Bandung's culinary scene, Acehese cuisine has a great opportunity to be developed in the city. One of the reasons is because Acehese cuisine offers a strong, authentic, and different flavor differentiation from the typical West Javanese cuisine or modern fusion dishes that dominate.

In addition to unique flavors, Acehese cuisine also presents high historical and cultural values, thus providing a culinary experience that is not only delicious, but also meaningful. Several Acehese culinary brands that have already established a presence in Bandung show that this culinary can be well received by the local community.

Facts on the ground show that some Acehese noodle brands in Bandung have been operating for more than 10 years and have regular customers, even becoming top-of-mind in certain circles. This proves that Acehese specialties are not only an “alternative”, but can become the main menu of choice for consumers, especially for lovers of spicy, soupy and spice-rich food.

This development is reflected in the increasing number of shops, stalls, and cafes serving Aceh Noodles in Bandung, ranging from small-scale ones to those with several branches. Acehese noodle dishes have a place in the hearts of some consumers, and quite a few Acehese noodle brands or businesses have been operating for more than a decade. Some of them have even built a strong brand position and are widely recognized among local foodies, either because they were already present in the market, or because of consistency in taste, strategic location, and a network of loyal customers formed over time.

The presence of various Acehnese noodle brands in Bandung shows that the people of Bandung have a good interest and acceptance of the taste of Acehnese noodles, making this city as one of the potential markets for the expansion of Acehnese culinary specialties.

In the midst of the growing variety of Aceh Noodle culinary businesses in Bandung, Selera Aceh comes as a new player that started operating in 2021. Located in the strategic area of Jl. Pahlawan No. 28, Bandung, Selera Aceh carries a mission to introduce Acehnese cuisine more widely, especially to people outside Aceh who are not familiar with the distinctive flavors of Acehnese culinary.

Since its establishment, Selera Aceh carries the concept of “authentic, affordable and comfortable”. The flavors offered come from authentic Acehnese recipes, which are processed by Acehnese-blooded chefs, thus ensuring the authenticity of the taste of the mainstay menus such as Acehnese noodle, Goat Curry, and Teh Tarik. Not only that, the atmosphere of the shop which is made comfortable and modern, as well as various facilities such as a large parking area, infokus for watching together, and live acoustic sessions on weekends, are added values that distinguish Selera Aceh from other Aceh Noodle shops.

In terms of marketing, Selera Aceh actively uses social media such as Instagram and TikTok, and collaborates with various local communities such as the Acehnese community who migrate in Bandung, car communities, students, and travel agencies. These efforts aim to build brand engagement and increase awareness organically. Selera Aceh is also present on various digital food delivery platforms such as GoFood, GrabFood, and ShopeeFood, which helps expand consumers' access to Selera Aceh's menus.

However, despite its strong flavor quality, good service, and loyal customers, Selera Aceh's brand position has yet to reach the “top-of-mind” category among the people of Bandung. In a marketing context, “top-of-mind” refers to the highest level of brand awareness, which is when a brand immediately comes to mind first when consumers think of a product category (Permadi, 2016). When a brand reaches this position, the potential to be chosen by consumers becomes much higher than other brands. By being top-of-mind, a brand has enormous competitive power, because without needing to think, consumers already associate the product with one specific name. Meanwhile, Selera Aceh's brand awareness is still limited to certain communities and has not reached a wider target market. Meanwhile, other brands that were first present in Bandung City have occupied a strong space in the minds of consumers due to factors such as length of existence, consistency of taste, and historical perception as “legendary Acehnese noodles”.

Therefore, the top-of-mind position is an important target for Selera Aceh. When people in Bandung want to enjoy Aceh noodles, the ultimate goal is for Selera Aceh to be the first brand that comes to mind. This not only impacts brand perception, but also directly correlates to increased brand awareness and potential revenue generation. In the culinary industry, being top-of-mind means being the first choice, and that means greater chances of being visited, recommended and repeated.

To achieve these goals, the right marketing strategy is essential. This research is conducted to discuss how Selera Aceh can build and strengthen its positioning strategy - placing the brand consistently in the minds of Bandung consumers through a relevant, targeted and data-driven approach. The positioning strategy in question will focus on making Selera Aceh a top-of-mind brand in the Aceh Noodle category in Bandung.

In other words, there was a gap between Selera Aceh's product strengths and its presence in the minds of Bandung consumers at large. This strategic challenge is the starting point for this research: how to develop a relevant and effective marketing strategy so that Selera Aceh can gain a stronger position in the competitive map and become one of the brands that immediately come to mind when people in Bandung want to enjoy Aceh Noodles.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity Model

The Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model, developed by Keller, explains the process of building brand equity from the consumer's perspective. According to Keller, building brand equity requires creating a brand that consumers are sufficiently aware of and with which they have strong, favourable, and unique brand associations (Shrestha et al., 2023). This process is illustrated through four sequential and interdependent stages, that is **brand salience** (brand identity), **brand performance & imagery** (brand meaning), **consumer**

**judgements & feelings** (brand responses), and **brand resonance** (brand relationships) (Keller, 2001). Each stage must be achieved progressively to establish a harmonious relationship between the brand and its customers, with brand resonance as the ultimate outcome, characterised by loyalty, a sense of community, active engagement, and emotional connection (Stukalina & Pavlyuk, 2021).

In the context of Selera Aceh, applying the CBBE model serves as a crucial foundation for its *repositioning* strategy. While Selera Aceh already holds a positioning as an authentic and affordable Acehese noodle brand, its *brand salience* and *brand meaning* need to be reinforced to create a more significant distinction from competitors and ultimately achieve *brand resonance*. By enhancing brand awareness, strengthening its unique image like authentic taste, Acehese cultural value, and competitive pricing, and building deeper emotional connections with Bandung consumers, Selera Aceh can move toward becoming the top-of-mind choice in the Acehese noodle category.

## 2.2. Brand Awareness & Top-of-Mind

Brand awareness is a fundamental component of brand equity, referring to a consumer's ability to recognize and recall a brand in various contexts (Aaker, 1996, as cited in Zeqiri et al., 2024). It plays a crucial role in shaping consumers' perceptions and guiding their decision-making process, particularly in highly competitive markets. On social media platforms, brand awareness can be enhanced through various strategies such as advertising, sales promotion, public relations, and direct consumer engagement activities that build emotional and cognitive connections between the consumer and the brand (Zeqiri et al., 2024).

Furthermore, brand awareness acts as a foundational element that influences other brand equity dimensions, including brand loyalty, brand associations, and perceived quality (Azzari & Pelissari, 2020). A high level of brand awareness often leads to stronger emotional attachment, trust, and eventual consumer preference toward a specific brand.

As defined by (Chen, 2024), brand awareness is the degree of familiarity and recognition a brand holds among its intended audience. It reflects the extent to which a brand shapes consumer perception in a cluttered and saturated market. In today's digital era, one effective method for enhancing brand awareness is the use of advertising on social media platforms. Social networks allow for targeted and interactive advertising campaigns that can significantly influence consumers' awareness and purchasing behavior (Sepehrian et al., 2021).

## 2.3. Positioning Strategy

Positioning is a revolutionary concept in branding that was first introduced by Al Ries and Jack Trout (1990), who defined it as a framework in which companies build their brand strategies to plan and expand relationships with customers (Shafiee et al., 2020). In this context, positioning serves as a bridge between product attributes and the benefits perceived by customers, by identifying a competitive and advantageous position in consumers' minds (Huang & Rust, n.d.).

Previous research indicates that adopting sustainable brand positioning offers various benefits for companies, including the opportunity to create unique product offerings (Centobelli, Cerchione, & Mittal, 2021), which in turn can enhance business performance (Lee & Park, 2016) (Casidy & Lie, 2023). However, formulating a positioning strategy is a significant challenge for marketers as it lies at the heart of consumer perceptions and preferences (Shafiee et al., 2020).

In the context of Selera Aceh, repositioning strategies are crucial considering that the brand already has a positioning as a provider of authentic and affordable Aceh noodles, but has not yet fully established itself in the minds of Bandung consumers as a top-of-mind brand. By leveraging consumer perception analysis and tools such as perceptual mapping and the STP framework (Segmentation, Targeting, Positioning) focused on the positioning aspect, and Positioning Statement by Geoffrey Moore, Selera Aceh can design a more refined strategy. This includes clear differentiation from competitors through emphasizing authentic imagery, strengthening Aceh cultural storytelling, and consistent value communication across all marketing channels. These efforts are expected to shift consumer perceptions, build emotional connections, and strengthen competitive advantages, enabling Selera Aceh to achieve top-of-mind status in the Bandung Aceh Noodles market.

## 2.4. Integrated Marketing Communication

From a strategic perspective, IMC represents a holistic approach to communication that emphasizes integration and coordination across multiple channels to deliver a consistent and compelling message to target audiences (Butkouskaya et al., 2024). By creating synergy between advertising, sales promotions, public relations, direct sells, and digital platforms, IMC plays a key role in shaping consumer perceptions and building brand equity. As noted by Kotler & Keller (2016), every customer touchpoint represents an opportunity to strengthen brand knowledge, which directly supports Keller's CBBE Model (2001).

In the context of this study, IMC (Integrated Marketing Communication) is highly relevant to Selera Aceh's repositioning strategy. Survey results show that most customers learn about Selera Aceh through its physical locations and word-of-mouth recommendations, while awareness through digital media remains limited. This indicates that Selera Aceh's current communication mix is not sufficiently integrated. By adopting IMC, Selera Aceh can integrate offline and online communication, ensuring that messages about Aceh's authentic culinary identity, cultural uniqueness, and the value it offers are consistently reinforced across all channels. This alignment will not only enhance brand awareness and brand strength but also reinforce Selera Aceh's repositioning strategy, ultimately supporting its goal of becoming the top brand in consumers' minds for Aceh noodles in Bandung.

## 2.5. Segmentation, Targeting, Positioning (STP) Theory

The Segmentation, Targeting, and Positioning (STP) model is one of the most fundamental and widely used approaches in strategic marketing. The framework helps companies understand their market, select the most appropriate target segments, and communicate their value proposition in a relevant and differentiated way. As stated by (Sharp et al., 2024) the STP model has become the dominant paradigm in both marketing education and practice, serving as the foundation for understanding how brands grow, compete, and evolve over time.

Kotler, who is credited with popularizing the STP theory, explains that successful marketing begins with identifying distinct customer groups within a broader market (segmentation), choosing which groups to serve (targeting), and crafting a compelling message or identity that resonates specifically with that chosen group (positioning). According to Sharp et al. (2024), most marketing textbooks emphasize that this approach recognizes the heterogeneity of customer needs, thus allowing marketers to tailor offerings that are more relevant and effective.

In today's dynamic and highly saturated markets, especially in consumer-centric industries like food and beverage, the implementation of STP allows businesses to differentiate themselves more clearly and build stronger positioning in the minds of their target consumers.

## 2.6. Perceptual Mapping

Perceptual mapping has long been recognized as a critical analytical tool in marketing research, particularly in understanding how brands are positioned in the minds of consumers. Perception itself refers to the process by which individuals select, organize, and interpret stimuli to form a coherent and meaningful view of the world (Schiffman, 2015; . Bist & Mehta, 2023). Perceptual maps illustrate the position each brand occupies within a consumer's "perceptual space" relative to competing offerings (Gigauri, 2019; Kohli & Leuthesser, 1993). These maps provide valuable insights into branding challenges and positioning strategies (Bhattacharyya & Dasgupta, 2014 as cited in Bist & Mehta, 2023). One of the most common applications of perceptual mapping is to visualize brand positioning within a competitive landscape. Typically represented as a two-dimensional diagram, brands are plotted based on key attributes such as price, quality, or brand awareness (Appinio, 2024). This visualization helps businesses assess how consumers perceive their brand compared to competitors and identify potential strategic gaps in the market.

## 3. Proposed Method

### 3.1. Research Design

Research design refers to the overall strategy and structure used to integrate the various components of research in a coherent and logical manner. This research employs a qualitative case study design to obtain an in-depth understanding of consumer perceptions and experiences regarding Selera Aceh's brand positioning. The case study approach is considered appropriate because this research aims to explore the real context of Selera Aceh as an Acehnese culinary business in Bandung by capturing consumer insights in a natural and contextual environment. Analysis will be conducted using Thematic Analysis, following the framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019). This method involves a systematic process of familiarization, coding, theme development, theme review, and interpretation, enabling researchers to identify patterns and key insights from the data. The findings generated through thematic analysis will be used as the basis for formulating strategic recommendations related to the repositioning of Selera Aceh.

### **3.2. Data Collection Method**

This study uses a qualitative approach with primary and secondary data sources to gain an in-depth understanding of consumer perceptions of Selera Aceh and the competitive dynamics in the Aceh noodle market in Bandung. This method was chosen based on the need to explore consumer experiences, opinions, and perceptions that cannot be explained only using quantitative data. The primary data collection method is a semi-structured interview conducted with Selera Aceh customers. Respondents were selected using purposive sampling, as this study required participants who had direct experience with Acehnese noodle products at Selera Aceh. The research location was focused on Bandung City because it is the main target market center and Selera Aceh's operational location. The age range of 25–60 years was chosen because this group represents consumers with stable purchasing power and a tendency to try authentic Indonesian cuisine, this is also in line with the results of a customer survey analysis conducted by Selera Aceh that most of its customers come from this age range. Acehnese noodle products were chosen as the focus because they are the mainstay menu as well as the mainstay menu and best seller at Selera Aceh.

The number of interviewees in this study was determined using the principle of data saturation, which is the point at which additional interviews no longer yield new information or codes relevant to the research focus (Guest et al., 2006; Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Based on the empirical results of a study conducted by Hennink and Kaiser (2022) in Social Science & Medicine, most qualitative studies reach data saturation between 9 and 17 interviews, with an average of 12–13 interviews for a relatively homogeneous population. Considering the characteristics of this study's respondents, Selera Aceh customers with similar demographic backgrounds and relatively homogeneous consumption experiences, a sample of 15 interviewees was deemed sufficient to achieve data saturation and represent rich and in-depth findings.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

### **4.1. Thematic Analysis Findings**

This subsection presents the main findings of the thematic analysis of in-depth interviews with 15 Selera Aceh customers. The analysis focused on how consumers interpreted their experiences in terms of taste, dining experience, price, promotions, and their perception of Selera Aceh's position compared to other Aceh noodle brands in Bandung.

The thematic findings were then linked to Keller's four main dimensions of Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) that is brand identity, brand meaning, brand response, and brand relationship to map the strengths and weaknesses of Selera Aceh's brand equity from the consumer's perspective. The results of this mapping serve as the basis for formulating repositioning strategy proposals and integrated marketing communication (IMC) plans, which will be discussed in the Business Solutions and Implementation Plan sections.

#### **4.1.1. Coding Process and Use of NVivo**

Data analysis of the interviews in this study followed the stages of Braun and Clarke's Thematic Analysis described in Chapter III, starting from familiarization with the transcripts, initial coding, theme development, review, naming, to interpretation of the results. All interview transcripts were transcribed verbatim, then imported into NVivo 15 software to facilitate data organization, coding, and retrieval of relevant quotes.

In the initial coding stage, the researcher assigned codes to statements related to the research focus, such as impressions of the taste of Aceh noodles, dining experiences at Selera Aceh, price perceptions, sources of awareness, comparisons with competitors, and suggestions for improvement and promotion. The codes were then grouped into several initial themes in line with the CBBE dimensions (salience, performance & imagery, judgments & feelings, and resonance), then reviewed again until final themes were formed that were consistent, interrelated, and able to answer the research questions.

NVivo 15 was used to calculate the frequency of code occurrence, trace the distribution of codes across respondents, and compile a matrix linking code–theme–CBBE dimension. The final results of this process are presented in the form of a Code–Theme–CBBE–IMC table in the following subsection, which then becomes the basis for compiling key insights and strategic positioning recommendations for Selera Aceh as one of the top-of-mind Aceh noodle brands in Bandung.

#### 4.1.2. Code – Theme – CBBE - IMC Matrix

Based on the coding process described in the previous subsection, the researcher grouped all interview codes into several main themes and mapped them onto Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) dimensions. Table IV.2 below summarizes the relationship between codes, themes, CBBE dimensions, and initial implications for the integrated marketing communication (IMC) strategy design for Selera Aceh.

**Table 2.** Thematic Analysis Results: Code, Theme, CBBE Dimension, and IMC Implication

Code	Synthesized theme	Main CBBE dimension	Direction of IMC implication
Taste of Selera Aceh noodles; Selera Aceh better than competitor; Comeback because the experience; Rate for Selera Aceh	1. Authentic & good Acehnese taste as key driver	Brand Performance & Brand Judgements (quality, differentiation, value)	Advertising & digital marketing – The main communication emphasizes the deliciousness and authenticity of Aceh Selera Aceh spices, compared to ordinary noodles and competitors. Use testimonials about the strong flavor, perfect spiciness, and “just like eating in Aceh” in digital content and offline promotional materials at the venue.
Dining experience at Selera Aceh; Visit Selera Aceh more than once; Recommend Selera Aceh to others; Comeback because the experience	2. Cozy, homey, and memorable dining experience	Brand Imagery, Brand Feelings & Brand Resonance (comfort, emotional bond, repeat & advocacy)	Advertising & digital marketing - Highlight the homey atmosphere, a comfortable place to hang out with friends or family, friendly service, distinctive interior (example like milk pyramids, displays about the Aceh region, wooden ceilings that give the impression of being at home, cleanliness) in visuals featured on Instagram, TikTok, and Google photos, building a narrative of “a comfortable place that is always a favorite for eating Aceh noodles with loved ones.”
Perception of Selera Aceh noodle price; Rate for Selera Aceh	3. Accessible value for money (affordable but cafe-like)	Brand Judgements (value for money, fairness)	Advertising, sales promotion, and point of sale materials – Communicate the message that prices are “affordable for the quality of an Aceh cafe.” Highlight the portion sizes, quality, and ambiance customers receive for a price they consider reasonable or even relatively



Code	Synthesized theme	Main CBBE dimension	Direction of IMC implication
Know Selera Aceh from friends; Know Selera Aceh from order online platform; Know Selera Aceh from passing by; Know Selera Aceh from social media; Share awareness by social media; General information about Selera Aceh; Competitor brand name	4. Multi-channel brand awareness & discovery	Brand Salience & Part of Competitive Set	cheap, without positioning it as a cheap eatery. Advertising & digital marketing - Build consistent awareness through three distinct channels: 1. Prominent flyers along the roadside, 2. Optimized online apps (photos, descriptions, promotions), and regular content on Instagram and TikTok. 2. Encourage word-of-mouth by inviting customers to tag and share their experiences, so that Selera Aceh comes to mind first when people think of “Aceh noodles in Bandung.”
Like discount in Selera Aceh; Like happy hour promotions; Like live music or event in Selera Aceh; Like promotion by loyalty card; Like promotion in social media; Other input for Selera Aceh to be top-of-mind	5. Engaging promotions & community based activities	Brand Judgements, Feelings & Resonance (excitement and participation)	Sales promotion, events & sponsorship, and digital marketing – Design an IMC mix such as targeted discounts and bundling, happy hour programs during lunch breaks or after work hours, loyalty cards, and community events such as live music, movie screenings, and gatherings for various communities. All of these should be promoted strongly and consistently via social media and collaboration with food content creators.
Minus for Selera Aceh; Impression of Selera Aceh’s logo, place, etc.; Other input for Selera Aceh to be top-of-mind	6. Brand gap & improvement opportunities	Brand Imagery, Salience & Overall Strategy	Public relations, advertising, digital marketing - Use feedback about the location being too far from the city center, branding not being strong or visible enough, and the Aceh vibe not being strong enough as input for improvement. Strengthen Aceh visual elements like the logo, interior, and Aceh music, create a clear message that this Aceh noodle is for everyone in Bandung and can be enjoyed by anyone, and create a visual campaign and storytelling about all customer feedback. Communicate these improvements more consistently and effectively for each narrative to be presented.

(Source: Author, 2025)

#### 4.1.3. Discussion by theme: connection with CBBE, example quotes, key insights

##### 1. Theme 1 - Authentic & good Acehese taste as key driver

The interview results show that taste is the main driver for customers to come and return to Selera Aceh. Many respondents consider the Aceh noodles at Selera Aceh to have a strong flavor, rich and authentic seasoning, the right level of spiciness, and a taste that is different from regular noodles or Aceh noodles at other places. One participant mentioned that the taste of the noodles *"in here (Selera Aceh) the Aceh's noodles is matches the standard of Acehese food I tried in Aceh"* and even felt that it was *"similar to eating in Aceh"*, while another respondent described the noodles as having *"perfect noodle texture, perfect spiciness, and seasoning that is just right, not too thick or overpowering."* Several customers felt that the taste of Aceh noodles served by Selera Aceh suited their palates and therefore gave Selera Aceh a fairly high overall rating.

These findings reflect the dimensions of Brand Performance and Brand Judgments in the CBBE framework, as consumers assess the product quality, authenticity of the seasoning, and superior taste of Selera Aceh compared to other competitors of Acehese cuisine, especially other Mie Aceh competitor brands in Bandung. This positive perception of quality and differentiation is an important foundation for repositioning efforts, as it indicates that Selera Aceh's products are already able to meet and even exceed consumer expectations. Therefore, the IMC strategy needs to highlight the narrative of the deliciousness and authenticity of Aceh spices in Mie Aceh at Selera Aceh, for example through customer testimonials about taste, stories behind the recipes, and visually appealing food images both digitally and in promotional materials at outlets.

##### 2. Theme 2 - Cozy, homey, and memorable dining experience

In addition to taste, the dining experience at Selera Aceh is also a main reason customers feel comfortable and want to return. Respondents described the atmosphere as cozy and homey, suitable for dining with friends or family, working on a laptop, or simply hanging out. One participant mentioned that the place *"feels nice and homey, with wooden seating that makes it feel like eating at home"*, while another stated that they felt *"happy and satisfied because the place is comfortable, the service is good, and it feels like being at home."* Others highlighted unique details such as *"a funny pyramid of sweetened condensed milk that other places do not have"*, which made the outlet feel distinctive. Customers also appreciated moments such as being offered free ice cream or roti canai at the cashier, and some noted that during quieter hours Selera Aceh is ideal for introverted guests because the seating is well spaced and the kitchen is located far enough from the dining area so it wasn't noisy. Several customers mentioned that they had returned multiple times and brought other people with them, indicating that the experience left a strong impression.

This theme is closely related to the dimensions of Brand Imagery, Brand Feelings, and Brand Resonance in CBBE. The comfortable and "home-like" atmosphere evokes positive feelings and a sense of closeness, providing an emotional reason for consumers to make repeat visits and recommend Selera Aceh to others. This means that the experience at the outlet can be one of the main pillars in building long-term relationships with customers. The implication for IMC is the need to highlight this homey and memorable atmosphere in all communication materials, for example through photo and video content of the outlet atmosphere, staff interactions with customers, and storytelling about *"a favorite place to eat Aceh noodles with loved ones"* on Instagram, TikTok, and Google.

##### 3. Theme 3 - Accessible value for money (affordable but cafe-like)

Interview findings show that most customers consider the price of Acehese noodles at Selera Aceh to be reasonable and in line with the quality they receive. They associate the price with several aspects at once: portions that feel sufficient, strong and authentic taste, and an atmosphere that is closer to a café than a regular food stall. One respondent stated that *"the taste, quality, and service are all quite good, and the prices are affordable"*, while another, a respondent who works as a teacher said *"For me, as a teacher with a modest income, it's still quite affordable"*. A customer also mentioned *"paying around IDR 27,000 for prawn Acehese noodles feels sufficient"* for what they get. Customers from different professional backgrounds, including teachers, office workers, and former students, consistently perceived Selera Aceh's prices as reasonable compared with the overall dining experience, and some even described them as relatively cheap for a café-like setting.

This theme is directly related to the Brand Judgments dimension, particularly the perception of value for money and fairness within the CBBE framework. Consumers not only assess the nominal price, but also compare it with the functional and emotional benefits they

get when eating at Selera Aceh. This is an opportunity for a repositioning strategy to reinforce Selera Aceh's position as an “affordable Aceh noodle cafe” without compromising the image of the quality it offers. The IMC implication is the importance of communicating the combination of taste, portion size, and atmosphere in pricing messages, for example through content that shows portion size, outlet ambience, service, and other added value such as location, parking space, Wi-Fi availability, and plenty of power outlets, so that consumers perceive that the price paid is commensurate with the experience received, not just “cheap”.

#### **4. Theme 4 - Multi-channel brand awareness & discovery**

Interview data shows that customers first became aware of Selera Aceh through various channels. Some respondents knew about Selera Aceh from friends or family, while others found it through online food ordering apps or social media content such as Instagram and TikTok, like one respondent mentioned *“I like to look at culinary content on TikTok and at that time, I saw content about Selera Aceh. So, I was curious about the Aceh Noodles here, and that's why I tried coming here”*, and another respondent explained *“the name Selera Aceh is also prominently displayed right on the roadside, and because I often pass by, that's how I know”*, and *“Sometimes I pass through Jalan Pahlawan, see Selera Aceh, finally get curious, and try it.”* which made them aware of the outlet.

However, it cannot be denied that passing by the location on Jalan Pahlawan and being attracted by the flyers or the “Selera Aceh” signboard are among the biggest factors in customers' awareness of Selera Aceh. Starting from the various interests of customers who were passing by Jalan Pahlawan or the surrounding areas of Cikutra, Katamso, Supratman, and other nearby roads, they became aware of Selera Aceh's existence.

This theme illustrates the dimension of Brand Salience in CBBE while positioning Selera Aceh as part of the competitive Aceh noodle brands in Bandung that are worth considering. The emergence of the brand through various channels shows that brand awareness is built through a combination of offline and online channels, complemented by interpersonal recommendations.

For IMC strategies, this emphasizes the need for a consistent multi-channel approach, such as strengthening physical visibility through signage and visual materials around the location, optimizing appearance and promotions on delivery apps, and managing regular and shareable social media content. By ensuring that these channels carry a consistent message, Selera Aceh increase its opportunity to be the first name that comes to mind when consumers search for “Aceh noodles in Bandung.”

#### **5. Theme 5 - Engaging promotions & community-based activities**

Respondents also expressed interest in various types of promotions and activities that could enhance their experience at Selera Aceh. Some customers mentioned that they liked discounts, happy hour promotions, loyalty card programs, and opportunities to get free products such as ice cream or cane bread. One respondents said *“I mentioned, having events like watch football soccer or any event could create memorable experiences”*. In addition, there were suggestions that Selera Aceh should hold events more often, such as live music, watching football soccer together, or community activities that would make the outlet a gathering place, and that all of these should be done regularly and consistently. Customers believe that promotions communicated through social media would be more attention-grabbing and encourage them to visit. Offline promotions would also bring about increased customer loyalty and retention, encouraging them to return to Selera Aceh.

This theme relates to the dimensions of Brand Judgments, Brand Feelings, and Brand Resonance. Promotions and community activities not only provide a boost in terms of increased purchases, but also create feelings of excitement, a sense of belonging, and closeness between customers and the brand. This can strengthen long-term relationships and encourage repeat visits. The resulting IMC implications are the importance of designing targeted promotional mixes such as discounts, vouchers, happy hours at certain times, loyalty card programs, and community events that are consistently communicated through social media and collaborations with food content creators. In this way, promotions do not stand alone but strengthen the image of Selera Aceh as a lively place for Aceh noodles that is close to its customers and related communities.

#### **6. Theme 6 - Brand gap & improvement opportunities**

In addition to positive appreciation, several respondents also expressed their criticisms and suggestions for improvement regarding Selera Aceh. Feedback included branding elements that were not prominent or consistent enough, as well as the Acehnese nuances in the interior and atmosphere that could be strengthened, like the respondent who said *“It would*

*be even better if there were elements of Acehnese culture, like songs or an atmosphere concept similar to that in Aceh. So that people in Bandung can get to know Acehnese culture too*". There were also suggestions for more aggressive communication and promotion so that more people in Bandung would know about Selera Aceh as a specialist in Aceh noodles. One respondents said *"I think Aceh Noodles need to be introduced more to other people in Bandung, so they can know and want to try it too. So give them the perception that this can be enjoyed not only by Acehnese people or Sumatrans like me but also by other Bandung residents."* This shows that several findings from interviews with respondents also suggested that Selera Aceh should more often emphasize that Aceh noodles are a type of noodle dish that can be enjoyed by a diverse range of people, even those from different regional backgrounds, and that it is not only people from Aceh or Sumatra who can appreciate and enjoy these noodles. This is because some sources feel that people in their immediate environment are still skeptical about Aceh noodles, thinking that they are too strong and spicy, even though Aceh noodles, despite their red and thick broth, are not that spicy because the spiciness does not come only from the chili but also from the many other spices used.

Additionally, there is a perception that the location is a little far from certain bustling areas such as the city center on Jalan Dago, Gasibu, Asia Afrika, and so on. However, this is certainly not something that can be resolved in the short term. Perhaps there needs to be consideration and long-term planning for the future expansion of Selera Aceh, which is more centered in the crowded areas of Bandung.

This theme reflects a gap in the dimensions of Brand Imagery and Brand Salience within the CBBE framework. Although the product is already strong in terms of taste and the dining experience is considered quite good, the visual identity and visibility of the brand are still not fully optimized in the eyes of consumers. Using this feedback as input for improvement is an important step in the repositioning process. From an IMC perspective, this implies the need to strengthen the visual elements of Aceh in the logo, interior, music, and communication materials, as well as to package campaigns that highlight the story of "Selera Aceh as a representation of authentic Aceh noodles in Bandung for all people". Communicating these improvement efforts consistently will help reduce the brand gap and strengthen Selera Aceh's position in the minds of consumers.

## 4.2. Business Solutions

### 4.2.1. Positioning Selera Aceh as an "Authentic Acehnese Noodles Café in Bandung" with a Brand Positioning Based on Taste Expertise.

Due to the large findings from interviews stating that they agreed that the biggest reason they returned to Selera Aceh was because of the great taste of Selera Aceh's Aceh noodles, it is important to make authentic taste and product excellence the foundation of the brand's positioning. There are several things that can be done for positioning.

- Start by formulating a positioning statement to serve as a guideline, for example, "Selera Aceh is an authentic Aceh noodle cafe in Bandung that serves distinctive Aceh spices with a strong and perfectly spicy flavor in a comfortable atmosphere for gathering." This strengthens the finding that customers return mainly because the taste is considered better and more authentic than competitors.
- Next, standardize and document the SOP for Aceh noodle recipes, from spice consistency and ingredient quality to spiciness levels. This is done to maintain high brand performance as the business grows.
- Create 1–2 signature menus that always stand out, such as "Special Aceh Noodles" with various toppings, which will become communication icons and always appear in advertising visuals, content, and promotions. This way, when people think of "Aceh noodles in Bandung," what comes to mind is Selera Aceh's signature menu.

### 4.2.2. Strengthening Brand Experience by refining the narration from "Homey Café" to "Aceh-style Hangout Place"

This solution executes the cozy-homey theme and the gap in Aceh's visual identity, so that Selera Aceh is positioned not just as a place to "eat noodles and go home," but as a base camp for hanging out, working on laptops, meeting friends, gathering with a community, with an Aceh feel that is still comfortable for the people of Bandung.

- A concept where Selera Aceh can be a place where Bandung people can experience the warm atmosphere of Aceh without feeling exclusive. This can be implemented by

strengthening Aceh's visual elements, such as adding wall ornaments, fabric motifs, photos or infographics about Aceh, and an Aceh music playlist, while still maintaining a clean and modern café atmosphere.

- Refine the factors already appreciated by customers, such as a comfortable layout, sufficient table spacing, clear signage for toilets and prayer rooms, and ensuring good hygiene. This will lock in the existing positive brand imagery and feelings.
- Incorporate a “homey” feel into consistent service SOPs, such as distinctive greetings, for example, greetings with a slight Acehese touch, personalized menu recommendations such as recommending Acehese noodle toppings based on each customer's taste and preferences or the level of spiciness according to the customer's preferences, and small gestures such as free mineral water or crackers during quiet hours. This strengthens the emotional connection with customers without incurring significant costs.

#### **4.2.3. Integrating the IMC Plan by implementing Multi-channel Awareness & Community Engine**

This solution aims to align all communication channels used by consumers to discover Selera Aceh into one coherent IMC plan.

- Advertising and outdoor communication. The storefront should be strengthened through a more contrasting and legible logo, enhanced lighting on the “Selera Aceh” sign, and a visual of the signature menu placed near the entrance or parking area. Standing banners with a clear campaign theme, such as “Authentic Acehese Noodles Café in Bandung”, can be used to capture the attention of people passing by the location.
- Digital marketing like social media and delivery applications. A weekly content calendar is developed around four main pillars that reflect the brand positioning like taste stories showcasing the preparation process and Acehese spices, atmosphere and hangout moments in the café, promotions and events such as happy hours and loyalty programmes, and short educational content about Aceh and Acehese noodles. Visuals and copywriting on Instagram, TikTok, and food-delivery platforms are aligned to consistently communicate authentic taste, the cozy café ambience, and clear value for money, supported by professional food photography, concise menu descriptions, and attractive bundling packages.
- Public relations and brand content. Customer comments that highlight the delicious taste, appropriate spiciness, and comfortable atmosphere are curated and transformed into formal communication materials, such as short quotes on in-store posters, carousel posts on Instagram, or brief notes on menus and websites. By repurposing these testimonials through owned and controlled channels, Selera Aceh can strengthen social proof while maintaining a consistent brand narrative across all elements of the IMC plan

#### **4.2.4. Promotions and Loyalty Programs to Increase Repeat Visits and Recommendations**

This solution transforms customer preferences for discounts, happy hours, and loyalty into medium-term promotional strategies.

- Happy hour promotions such as discounts on certain Aceh noodles, at certain hours which is communicated through posters at outlets, Instagram stories, and WhatsApp broadcasts. This is done to increase the number of new customers and customer retention.
- Loyalty program by develop a simple loyalty card as part of your customer relationship marketing. Display visuals and messages explaining the benefits of the loyalty card at the cashier, on the menu, and on digital channels to clearly understand the benefits of being a "loyal friend of Selera Aceh."
- Event & community marketing like make live acoustic music, watching football match together, or community gatherings a scheduled IMC activity. Each event is packaged with a consistent message "Aceh-style hangout place" and promoted through social media, posters in outlets, and collaborations with relevant communities/creators.

- Pricing communication by implement limitation pricing in all promotional materials so that price messages are always linked to value that it taste, portion size, atmosphere, not just discounts. This maintains Selera Aceh's image as an "affordable cafe," not a "cheap eatery."

#### 4.2.5. Strengthening Brand Identity to Close the Brand Gap

The final solution focuses on strengthening the brand identity as the foundation for all IMC activities. A light brand audit should first be conducted across existing communication materials such as the logo, colour palette, typography, photography style, and tone of voice followed by the development of a concise brand guideline. This guideline will serve as a reference for all IMC executions so that Selera Aceh's visual appearance and key messages remain consistent across the outlet, social media, and other online platforms.

In terms of visual identity, Acehnese elements for example motifs, illustrations, quotes, and photographs are applied in a modern way to the signboard, menu, digital content, and event promotional materials. The intention is to reinforce the brand imagery of an "Acehnese café in Bandung" without making the place feel exclusive only to certain communities.

All improvements are then tied together in a communication campaign titled "More Aceh, More Comfortable", introduced through social media, in-store materials, and community events. This campaign signals that Selera Aceh listens to customer feedback, enhances the Acehnese ambience, and remains a welcoming space for all Bandung residents.

### 5. Conclusion

This study finds that several key factors are required for an Acehnese noodle brand to become top-of-mind in Bandung. These include authentic and superior taste compared to both ordinary noodles and competing Acehnese noodle brands, a cozy and memorable dining experience, a clear value for money perception, consistent multi-channel brand awareness, engaging promotions and community based activities, and a strong, distinctive brand identity. When these factors are present and aligned, a brand is more likely to be recalled first when consumers think about "Acehnese noodles in Bandung".

Using Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) framework, the current positioning of Selera Aceh shows its strongest performance in the Brand Performance and Brand Feelings dimensions. Customers perceive Selera Aceh's noodles as tasty, authentic, and spicy in the right way, and they appreciate the cafe-like, homey atmosphere that supports gathering with friends and family. Price is generally regarded as fair for the quality, portion size, and ambience provided, which reinforces positive value for money judgements. However, there are still gaps in Brand Salience and Brand Imagery, especially related to the consistency of visual identity, the strength of the Acehnese ambience in the outlet, and the overall reach of Selera Aceh's marketing communication in comparison with more established competitors.

The thematic analysis of customer perceptions was then used to develop a sharper positioning strategy for Selera Aceh as an "Authentic Acehnese Noodles Café in Bandung", with an emphasis on taste expertise and the "Aceh style hangout place" experience. This strategy is translated into several business solutions, including the formulation of a clear positioning statement, standardised SOPs for mie Aceh recipes, the creation of signature menu items, enhancement of Acehnese visual elements and service rituals in the outlet, and an integrated marketing communication (IMC) plan that synchronises offline visibility, social media, online delivery platforms, word-of-mouth, and user-generated content.

Finally, the study proposes a set of improvements to Selera Aceh's positioning and marketing approach to move closer to top-of-mind status. These include structured promotions and loyalty programmes to drive repeat visits and recommendations, the application of pricing limitations and value-focused communication to maintain the "affordable café" image without sacrificing perceived quality, and brand identity initiatives such as a light brand audit, simple brand guidelines, and the "More Aceh, More Comfortable" campaign to communicate ongoing improvements. Taken together, these findings show that all four research objectives have been achieved like the key factors for top-of-mind status have been identified, Selera Aceh's current brand equity has been assessed, relevant frameworks and tools for repositioning have been applied, and strategic recommendations

have been developed to strengthen Selera Aceh's journey towards top-of-mind positioning in the Acehese noodle category in Bandung.

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