

The Smart Business Map Approach in Formulating Competitive Advantage Strategies in the Skincare Industry

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Abstract

Indonesia's skincare industry is growing rapidly but faces major challenges such as intense competition, shifting consumer preferences, and regulatory dynamics. This article explores how the Smart Business Map (SBM) approach can be strategically applied in a plant-based, vegetarian-friendly skincare business. Using a descriptive qualitative method, the study examines three key SBM components: Playing Field, Market Landscape, and Operational Profitability. The findings reveal that SBM assists entrepreneurs in understanding their business position, formulating value-driven strategies aligned with market needs, and developing a strong, sustainable value proposition. Sales and customer retention strategies that focus on transparency, education, and community engagement prove effective in fostering consumer loyalty in a value-conscious and ethical market segment.

Keywords: Smart Business Map; Business Strategy; Skincare Industry

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INTRODUCTION

In today's dynamic and competitive business environment, entrepreneurs require appropriate strategies to survive, grow, and gain a competitive edge in the market (Almira, 2023). One sector that has experienced rapid growth in recent years is the skincare industry (Nawiyah et al., 2023). Increasing public awareness of personal care, supported by the rise of social media and digital marketing, has driven the emergence of numerous local skincare brands in Indonesia (Nawiyah et al., 2023). However, despite the high market demand, this industry also faces significant challenges, including intense competition, shifting consumer preferences, and evolving product regulations.

Many skincare business actors, particularly new brands, struggle to formulate effective business strategies especially in responding to external environmental changes and understanding ever-evolving consumer behavior. Therefore, a strategic approach is needed that is not only reactive but also capable of systematically and purposefully mapping market conditions (Silva et al., 2021).

One approach that has begun to gain attention in business development is the Smart Business Map (SBM) (Indriawati & Hasbi, 2023). SBM is a systematic thinking framework designed to help companies understand market problems, identify relevant customer segments, and develop solutions that align with market needs. This approach also includes an analysis of market potential and external factors that influence business success (Sari & Hasbi, 2022).

This article discusses how the application of SBM can assist skincare entrepreneurs in building competitive advantage and strategically diagnosing their business position.

Previous studies by Hidayat and Pranata (2021) have demonstrated the effectiveness of SBM in shaping business strategies in the UKM sector. However, this study takes a different approach by applying SBM directly to the context of the skincare business in Indonesia. The aim is to provide a concrete illustration of how SBM can be used as a business diagnostic tool to help skincare entrepreneurs formulate more adaptive, data-driven strategies that align with the dynamics of the highly competitive beauty industry. In this way, business actors can focus not only on product quality but also on building a business system that supports long-term growth.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach using a descriptive research design. This approach was chosen to provide an in-depth depiction of the implementation process of the Smart Business Map (SBM) in diagnosing and developing competitive advantage in skincare businesses.

The objective of this research is to explore how the three core elements of SBM—Playing Field, Market Landscape, and Operational Profitability—are applied within the context of the skincare industry. Data were collected through literature reviews, direct observation of business processes, and semi-structured interviews with skincare business practitioners.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of the Smart Business Map (SBM) approach in the skincare business demonstrates a significant contribution to building sustainable competitive advantage, particularly in an industry that is highly sensitive to trends, consumer preferences, and market dynamics (Sari & Hasbi, 2022). SBM serves not only as a strategic planning tool but also as a conceptual framework that enables business actors to understand and respond to market changes in a systematic and adaptive manner. Overall, the Smart Business Map is divided into three key areas (Indriawati & Hasbi, 2023):

Playing Field in the Skincare Business

In the initial stage of the Smart Business Map (SBM), the Playing Field serves as a foundational framework for understanding where the business currently stands and where it is heading. It is a critical component that must be addressed before launching a business, or revisited when an existing business shows limited progress (Andreevna, 2020). This stage involves five key questions that business actors must answer before or during the course of their operations:

1. Problem Identification (What is the Problem?)

The first stage in the Playing Field, problem identification is a crucial foundation in determining the strategic direction of the business (Pau, 2006). This process goes beyond recognizing surface-level symptoms; it involves a deep exploration of unmet consumer needs and the gaps between customer expectations and market realities. In the context of plant-based skincare, the primary issue identified is the limited availability of explicitly vegetarian-friendly skincare products, those that not only use plant-derived ingredients but are also entirely free from animal-based elements in every aspect, including active ingredients, production processes, and testing methods.

Vegetarian consumers often struggle to verify the clarity of ingredients and production processes of the skincare products they use (Santos et al., 2023). Labels such as “natural” or “organic” do not necessarily guarantee that a product is free from animal-derived substances or cruelty-free (Lee & Kwon, 2022). The lack of transparency

from producers, coupled with the absence of accessible consumer education, forces users to seek information independently, often encountering confusing, unreliable, or contradictory data (Le et al., 2024).

Through the SBM approach, this skincare brand mapped the core problem not only to product formulation but also to the limited availability of openly provided information regarding ingredient sources, production processes, and certifications that ensure a product is genuinely vegan-friendly. This issue is increasingly relevant, as plant-based skincare holds significant added value and is gaining growing market interest (Khang et al., 2023).

Vegetarian skincare is considered safer for sensitive skin due to its tendency to avoid ingredients that may cause irritation or allergic reactions (Park & Lee, 2021). Beyond safety, ethical aspects are also a major consideration; these products are typically not tested on animals and align with eco-conscious lifestyles and concern for animal welfare. From an environmental perspective, plant-based skincare products generally have a lower ecological footprint compared to animal-based alternatives in terms of carbon emissions, water usage, and waste management. Additionally, plant-derived active ingredients are known to be rich in antioxidants and natural nutrients that support overall skin regeneration and health (Aavik, 2023).

These advantages resonate with the growing trend of sustainable and ethical living, particularly among younger consumers who are more value-conscious and vocal in supporting brands with strong social and environmental missions (Ki & Lee, 2023). With this understanding, the brand is not only formulating functional solutions for skin concerns such as acne or dullness but is also addressing consumers' emotional and ethical needs. Therefore, the problem identification process becomes a vital foundation for building brand positioning as a pioneer of plant-based skincare that is transparent, safe, and aligned with vegetarian lifestyle principles.

2. Determining the Target Market (Who Has the Problem?)

The second stage involves identifying who is experiencing the problem—in other words, determining the primary target market most affected by the previously mapped gap. Accurately defining the target market is crucial, as it shapes product development direction, communication strategies, and distribution approaches (Ilham, 2024).

In the context of plant-based skincare products specifically formulated to be vegetarian-friendly, the initial target segment comprises consumers who adopt vegetarian and vegan lifestyles, particularly individuals aged 20 to 35 years (Jenkins et al., 2019). This demographic generally resides in urban areas, possesses high digital literacy, and demonstrates strong awareness of personal health, environmental sustainability, and ethical consumption. They tend to be highly selective in their product choices and show preferences for items free from animal-derived ingredients such as gelatin, animal-based collagen, lanolin, or those tested on animals (Park & Lee, 2021).

For this consumer group, purchasing decisions are often seen as expressions of commitment to a sustainable lifestyle. They actively seek information through digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, and engage in communities that discuss environmental issues, product ethics, and healthy living. Therefore, a brand's presence in the digital space, coupled with transparent and educational narratives is vital for building emotional connection and consumer loyalty.

By understanding the demographic, psychographic, and behavioral characteristics of this target market, companies can craft more precise and relevant product development and brand communication strategies. This includes using language aligned with consumer values, selecting appropriate digital distribution channels, and designing

products that are not only visually appealing but also reflect the brand's commitment to transparency, sustainability, and social responsibility. Through this focused and value-based segmentation approach, vegetarian skincare brands have a significant opportunity not only to meet consumer needs but also to foster long-term loyalty through emotional resonance and shared lifestyle principles.

3. Developing a Relevant Solution (What is the Solution?)

The solution developed must directly address consumers' unmet needs while simultaneously strengthening the business's positioning within a highly competitive market. In this context, the solution is not limited to product formulation alone but also includes the business model, communication approach, and distribution systems.

The primary solution offered by this skincare brand is the introduction of a plant-based skincare product line that is genuinely vegetarian- and vegan-friendly. This commitment encompasses the use of plant-derived ingredients, the exclusion of animal-based components or derivatives, and the avoidance of animal testing (cruelty-free). Each product is also designed with sensitive skin in mind, formulated to be free from allergens, synthetic fragrances, and high-risk additives.

To address the demand for transparency and education, the brand provides clear and verified information regarding product composition, ingredient sourcing, production processes, and vegan and environmental certifications. This communication is presented in an engaging, educational, and accessible manner through digital channels such as the official website, social media platforms, and QR codes on packaging, which allow consumers to directly access detailed product information. This approach fosters trust and loyalty, while making it easier for consumers to make purchasing decisions aligned with their personal values.

Additionally, the solution includes a community-based and experiential marketing strategy. The brand does not merely sell products; it cultivates an ecosystem that supports a healthy lifestyle. This is implemented through social campaigns, collaborations with value-aligned influencers, and active consumer involvement in product development through surveys and co-creation platforms. Such initiatives establish stronger, two-way relationships between the brand and its customers.

With this approach, the proposed solution goes beyond addressing skin concerns; it also embodies the values of sustainability, health, and ethics that are central to vegetarian and vegan consumers. The solution offers strong differentiation potential, as it fills a gap that remains underserved by the majority of existing skincare brands.

Overall, the solution presented by this brand is not merely product-centric but also consumer-centric and value-centric. This makes it a strategic step toward building a brand that is not only competitive but also socially and ecologically meaningful.

4. Analyzing Market Potential (How Big is the Market?)

Market potential analysis is a strategic step in assessing the feasibility of a business idea and ensuring that the developed product has room for growth within a competitive industry landscape (Samsudin, 2023). In the context of plant-based skincare specifically designed for vegetarian and vegan consumers, market potential assessment not only encompasses the overall skincare market size, but also focuses on consumer segments that prioritize environmentally friendly, ethical, and animal-free products.

The plant-based skincare industry is experiencing robust growth, driven by increasing consumer awareness regarding skin health and animal welfare (Kim & Lee, 2021). According to reports from Statista and Grand View Research, the vegan skincare

market is projected to grow at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of over 6% in the coming years. In Indonesia, a similar trend is emerging, particularly among millennials and Gen Z consumers, who are value-conscious, digitally active, and play a significant role in advancing the ethical economy (*Vegan Cosmetics Market To Reach \$26.16 Billion By 2030*, 2025).

Furthermore, analysis of consumer search trends on social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, along with data from Google Trends, indicates a significant increase in searches for keywords such as “vegan skincare,” “cruelty-free skincare,” and “plant-based beauty” over the past three years. This suggests that consumers are not only interested in the functional benefits of skincare products, but also in the ethical values behind them (Hertweck, 2021).

The targeted market segment, consumers aged 20 to 35 with a vegetarian or vegan lifestyle, residing in urban areas, and possessing high digital literacy, represents a group with considerable purchasing power and strong social influence. These consumers are also known as trendsetters in the personal care consumption space.

Considering the growth trends, shifts in consumer behavior, and the wide-open market gap, it can be concluded that the vegetarian skincare market holds promising long-term potential. Therefore, this market analysis reinforces the relevance of the brand’s strategic direction and highlights the high opportunity for sustainable business growth in the future.

5. Evaluating External Factors (What Factors Will Impact the Business?)

The final stage in the Playing Field component is to analyze external factors that may influence business success, including changes in BPOM (Indonesian Food and Drug Authority) regulations, global trends, and fluctuations in the prices of natural raw materials.

Price volatility in natural raw materials, particularly certified organic plant-based active ingredients, poses a notable challenge. Limited availability, climate disruptions, and dependence on imports can all impact production costs. Therefore, implementing supplier diversification strategies and formulation innovations is essential to maintain product quality and price stability.

Overall, the findings of this study demonstrate that the Smart Business Map (SBM) serves not only as a strategic planning tool but also as a structured, data-driven decision-making framework. Competitive advantage in the skincare business stems not only from product quality but also from the enterprise’s ability to understand the market, respond to consumer needs, and navigate industrial changes effectively.

By consistently applying the SBM framework, skincare entrepreneurs can develop strategies that are adaptive, efficient, and customer value-oriented an essential approach for surviving and thriving in the ever-evolving beauty industry landscape.

Market Landscape in the Skincare Business

The second stage in the Smart Business Map (SBM) approach is *Market Landscape*, which focuses on understanding market conditions, identifying the product or service's Unique Selling Proposition (USP), competing effectively with competitors, and developing strategies to win consumers’ hearts and build loyalty (Allison et al., 2021).

1. Why Do Consumers Choose Your Product?

One of the fundamental questions in building a superior business is: Why do consumers choose our product over others in the market? The answer lies in the clarity of the USP, which refers to the unique value proposition that the business offers to its

consumers. In this study, the vegetarian skincare product carries several unique characteristics, including:

- a. 100% Plant-Based Ingredients: Offers a solution for consumers who care about sustainability, practice a vegetarian/vegan lifestyle, and seek to avoid animal-derived substances.
- b. Ethical and Environmentally Friendly: Free from animal testing, utilizes eco-friendly packaging, and supports a sustainable supply chain.
- c. Safe for Sensitive Skin and Halal-Certified: Due to the absence of animal-derived ingredients and harsh synthetic chemicals, the products are safer for sensitive skin and suitable for Muslim consumers.
- d. Promotes a Healthy and Mindful Lifestyle: Targets consumers who not only aim for beauty but also uphold ethical values in their daily lives.

This USP functions not only as a key differentiator in the highly saturated skincare market, but also as a foundation for building brand trust (Wagner, 2024). Strong branding should be reflected through visual identity (minimalist and natural packaging, logos that represent natural values), a warm and educational tone of voice, and consistent messaging across all distribution and communication channels.

2. How Do You Sell the Product?

In today's digitally connected era, consumers can easily access information and select skincare products that align with their personal needs and values. Consequently, sales strategy becomes a critical aspect in enhancing competitiveness and expanding market reach, especially for products with niche segmentation such as vegetarian skincare.

Vegetarian skincare products are strategically marketed through a combination of digital marketing and value-based educational approaches. This includes utilizing multiple digital platforms such as social media (Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube), online marketplaces (Shopee, Tokopedia), and the brand's official website (Andarwati et al., 2025). The shared content goes beyond promotion by offering educational information, such as the benefits of plant-based ingredients, the importance of eco-conscious living, and facts about cruelty-free skincare. This strategy aims to build emotional engagement and trust with the brand, particularly among younger consumers who are generally more aware of sustainability and product ethics.

In addition, the product distribution system adopts an omnichannel approach, combining online and offline sales. Online channels are optimized for broader and cost-efficient reach, while the presence in physical retail spaces (e.g., partner concept stores, pop-up booths, or eco-friendly beauty clinics) serves to strengthen direct consumer experiences with the products, thereby shaping perceptions of quality.

This marketing model is further reinforced through strategic collaborations with green influencers and communities focused on veganism or healthy living, in order to generate organic word-of-mouth (Rajab, 2021). Thus, the sales strategy for vegetarian skincare is not merely transactional in nature, but rather aims at cultivating long-term relationships with consumers through shared values.

3. How Do You Retain Customers?

In a highly competitive business ecosystem, particularly within the skincare industry, customer retention is equally—if not more—critical than acquiring new customers (Gazi et al., 2025). Vegetarian skincare products, which embody values of sustainability, ethics,

and natural skin health, hold significant potential for fostering value-driven consumer loyalty.

The primary strategy for retaining customers begins with the creation of an emotional connection between the brand and its consumers. This is achieved through consistent delivery of brand messages that align with consumer values and lifestyle, particularly environmental consciousness and transparent use of natural ingredients (Xin & Lim, 2025).

Moreover, loyalty is reinforced through the implementation of community-based customer engagement strategies (Srivastava et al., 2025). Building user communities, whether via social media platforms, online forums, or offline events such as natural skincare workshops, encourages a sense of belonging to the brand. Consumers are no longer merely buyers of a product; they become participants in a broader movement for healthy and eco-conscious living, as represented by the vegetarian skincare brand.

Operational Profitability in the Vegetarian Skincare Business

The third stage in the Smart Business Map (SBM) framework is Operational Profitability, which focuses on how businesses can sustainably improve financial performance and operational efficiency (Septiandari & Soelistya, 2025). At this stage, four strategic questions serve as the main guidelines for managing business profitability: 1) How to increase revenue? 2) How to manage costs? 3) How to manage core resources? And 4) How to develop the team?

1. How to increase revenue?

Revenue enhancement strategies in the vegetarian skincare business are carried out through product diversification, service quality improvement, and the expansion of distribution channels. Plant-based products have a wide market potential due to increasing consumer awareness of sustainability and skin health.

Revenue is also increased through product innovation, such as skincare variants for sensitive skin and teenagers, as well as environmentally friendly packaging. In addition, the use of digital channels (marketplaces, social media, and the official website) along with promotional strategies such as bundling, seasonal discounts, and collaborations with vegan communities help broaden the market reach and encourage repeat purchases (Amilinda & Iltiriah, 2025).

2. How to manage costs?

Cost management is carried out by optimizing the supply chain, selecting more affordable local raw materials, and improving efficiency in the production process. The use of digital systems for inventory management and production planning also helps reduce waste and enhances control over expenditures.

3. How to manage core resources?

Core resources such as raw materials, formulations, production equipment, and distribution networks are managed systematically. Establishing long-term partnerships with suppliers, maintaining production quality, and securing intellectual property rights (trademarks and formulations) are essential steps in sustaining operational excellence.

4. How to develop the team?

Team development is achieved through regular training, strengthening understanding of brand values (vegetarian and environmentally friendly), and implementing a transparent performance evaluation system. Creating a healthy and collaborative work environment encourages productivity and fosters long-term employee loyalty.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the Smart Business Map (SBM) serves as a strategic approach for skincare entrepreneurs, particularly those operating in the plant-based and vegetarian-friendly product segment. SBM not only facilitates the identification of market problems and formulation of relevant solutions but also enables business actors to gain a deeper understanding of their consumers and how to build sustainable competitive advantages. With a strong unique selling proposition, educational digital sales strategies, and community- and value-based customer retention, skincare brands can foster long-term loyalty. The findings of this study highlight the importance of a thorough understanding of market dynamics, consumer values, and the readiness to respond to external factors through adaptive and data-driven business planning.

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