



Legal Certainty in Resolving Trademark Disputes Involving Substantial Similarities to Registered Trademarks of Other Parties

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Abstract: The increasing number of trademark registrations in Indonesia reflects a growing awareness among business actors regarding the importance of legal protection for product or service identity. However, this trend also triggers legal disputes, particularly when a newly registered trademark bears substantial similarity to an existing registered trademark. This study aims to analyze the resolution of trademark disputes involving substantial similarities to registered trademarks of other parties, and to examine the legal certainty surrounding such dispute resolution through trademark cancellation lawsuits in the Commercial Court and arbitration proceedings. The research used a normative juridical method by examining written legal norms such as legislation, court decisions, and analyzing relevant concrete cases. The results indicate that resolution through cancellation lawsuits in the Commercial Court is transparent and offers legal protection through judicial processes. However, it faces challenges such as lengthy procedures and limited judicial understanding of intellectual property. In contrast, arbitration offers a faster and more efficient alternative, yet remains underutilized due to weak contractual awareness. In terms of legal certainty, court litigation provides binding legal force through decisions that may serve as jurisprudence, while arbitration ensures certainty through final and binding awards, although enforcement remains limited. In conclusion, optimizing both avenues requires robust regulatory support and legal education for business actors.

Keyword: Trademark Dispute Resolution, Legal Certainty, Trademark, Constitutional Court, Arbitration.

INTRODUCTION

The responsibility of the Directorate General of Intellectual Property (DGIP) in managing registered trademarks in Indonesia is of great importance, particularly concerning trademarks that bear substantial similarity in name. This matter relates to the protection of trademark owners' rights and the public interest. Similar trademarks may lead to consumer confusion and potentially harm the legitimate trademark owners (Kristiawan, 2020).

Law Number 20 of 2016 on Trademarks and Geographical Indications serves as the legal foundation governing the registration and protection of trademarks in Indonesia (Sulistyo, 2020). Its provisions outline the criteria for registrable trademarks and regulate name similarities that may infringe upon the rights of previously registered trademarks (Undang-Undang (UU) Nomor 20 Tahun 2016 Tentang Merek Dan Indikasi Geografis, 2016). A substantial similarity in name may be considered a trademark infringement if it causes consumer confusion. The Directorate of Intellectual Property is responsible for assessing whether a newly filed trademark application bears similarity to an already registered trademark, in terms of sound, appearance, or meaning (Sutrisno, 2020).

During the registration process, the Directorate of Intellectual Property conducts a substantive examination to determine whether the proposed trademark bears similarities to existing registered trademarks. If substantial similarity is identified, the new trademark application may be rejected. This process is intended to protect the rights of registered trademark owners from potential infringement (Halim, 2021). The responsibility of the Directorate of Intellectual Property extends beyond the registration examination. It also includes the enforcement of registered trademark rights. The Directorate must ensure that registered trademarks do not create confusion in the market and must protect the rights of trademark owners from infringements committed by third parties (Rahmawati, 2022).

Consumer confusion arising from similar trademarks can negatively impact the reputation and sales of products with registered marks. Studies have shown that consumers often fail to distinguish between two similar trademarks, which may lead to a loss of trust in the legitimate brand (Yulianto, 2020). When a dispute arises over trademarks with similar names, the Directorate of Intellectual Property is expected to play a role in mediation and dispute resolution. This process often involves complex legal arguments, in which the legitimate trademark owner must prove that their trademark has been used and is recognized by the public.

The Directorate of Intellectual Property also holds the responsibility of conducting outreach and providing information to the public and business actors regarding the importance of trademark registration and the consequences of using similar marks. These efforts can help reduce future disputes and raise awareness about intellectual property rights (Arifin, 2023). With technological advancements, the Directorate can utilize information systems to monitor registered trademarks and detect infringements more efficiently. Such systems support trademark surveillance and reduce the potential for confusion in the market (Amir, 2023).

The Directorate's responsibilities also include collaboration with other institutions, such as the Food and Drug Supervisory Agency (BPOM) and consumer protection agencies, to ensure that marketed products bear legitimate trademarks and do not mislead consumers (Nugroho, 2021). The enforcement of trademark rights involving similar names still faces various challenges, including limited resources and a lack of public understanding regarding intellectual property law (Siregar, 2021). The Directorate must address these challenges in order to effectively protect the rights of trademark owners. Evaluating the existing trademark registration system is also essential to ensure that the process remains transparent and fair. The Directorate of Intellectual Property must continuously adapt to developments in law and international practices to enhance the effectiveness of trademark protection in Indonesia (Lestari, 2022).

Numerous cases in Indonesia have demonstrated conflicts between registered trademark owners and new applicants whose trademarks bear substantial similarity in name. One such case involved a trademark dispute between Linda Anggereaningsih as the Plaintiff and Muhammad Shakeel as the Defendant, with the Government of the Republic of Indonesia represented by the Ministry of Law and Human Rights, the Directorate General of Intellectual Property, and the Directorate of Trademarks and Geographical Indications as Co-Defendants. In this case, the Plaintiff filed a lawsuit to cancel the trademark Umamascarves and claimed

trademark infringement, arguing that Umamascarves was substantially similar to her registered trademark Buttonsarves for the same category of goods. The Plaintiff alleged that the Defendant had acted in bad faith by registering a mark intended to imitate her own, thereby potentially causing consumer confusion. The lawsuit was granted by the Central Jakarta Commercial Court in Decision No. 3/Pdt.Sus-Merek/2023. However, the Defendant filed a cassation appeal, asserting that the trademark registration had been carried out by the prevailing regulations.

Another notable case was the dispute between PT. Kosmetika Global Indonesia, owner of the trademark MS Glow, and PT. PStore Glow Bersinar Indonesia, owner of the trademark PS Glow. The conflict centered on the similarity of the core elements of both trademarks and the issue of prior registration. Two court rulings were issued in this case. On 15 March 2022, MS Glow filed a lawsuit against PS Glow at the Medan Commercial Court, resulting in Decision No. 2/Pdt.Sus.HKI/Merek/2022/PN Niaga Medan. Conversely, on 5 April 2022, PS Glow filed a counterclaim against MS Glow at the Surabaya Commercial Court, which resulted in Decision No. 2/Pdt.Sus.HKI/Merek/2022/PN Niaga Surabaya. The court ruled that the rights to use the term “Glow” belonged to MS Glow, while the registration of the PS Glow trademark was cancelled.

Regarding trademark registration, MS Glow registered its trademark earlier on 20 September 2016 under registration number IDM000633038 for goods/services in Class 32 (instant powdered drinks and tea). In contrast, PS Glow was only registered on 1 May 2021 in Class 3 (cosmetics) under registration number IDM000943833. The counterclaim filed by PS Glow against MS Glow occurred after the court decision in Medan. Recommendations for strengthening trademark protection include reinforcing regulations, enhancing human resource capacity within the Directorate of Intellectual Property, and increasing collaboration between the public and private sectors in the protection of intellectual property rights (Widyastuti, 2023). The responsibility of the Directorate in managing registered trademarks that bear substantial similarity in name is essential to upholding justice and legal certainty. By strengthening registration processes, legal enforcement, and public education, the Directorate can more effectively safeguard the rights of trademark owners in Indonesia

In cases involving substantial similarity to a registered trademark of another party, such similarity may cause confusion among consumers and potentially harm the original trademark owner. The Trademark Law provides options for registered trademark owners who believe they have been harmed by the registration of a new, allegedly similar mark. One such option is filing a trademark cancellation lawsuit with the Commercial Court. This lawsuit seeks to annul the registration of a trademark that is considered to have significant similarity to an existing registered mark. The Commercial Court will assess whether the similarity is likely to mislead or confuse consumers, and if proven, may rule to cancel the newly registered trademark.

In addition, the Trademark Law also recognizes dispute resolution through arbitration or mediation as a faster and more cost-effective alternative. In such cases, the disputing parties may reach an agreement with the assistance of a neutral mediator or arbitrator. This pathway is expected to resolve disputes more amicably and avoid lengthy litigation processes.

METHOD

The research method is essentially a guideline or foundation used to conduct a study with the aim of finding solutions to a particular problem under discussion through the development of knowledge and scientific approaches (Efendi & Ibrahim, 2018). This study used a normative legal research method.

Normative legal research aims to examine the applicable legal norms in resolving trademark disputes involving substantial similarities to registered trademarks of other parties, whether through cancellation lawsuits in the Commercial Court or through arbitration. This

approach was used to analyze relevant statutory provisions, legal principles, and doctrines related to trademark protection and legal certainty in Indonesia.

Furthermore, the descriptive-analytical technique examines current problems with the intention of describing the phenomena as they were at the time the research was conducted (Fadjarajani et al., 2020). Data collection in this research is supported by primary, secondary, and tertiary sources. Primary sources were obtained from Indonesian national law. Secondary sources are obtained from books, scientific articles, and journals that discuss brand equality, while tertiary sources are obtained from the Big Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI) and sources accessed through internet sites.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Resolution of Trademark Disputes Involving Substantial Similarities to Registered Trademarks Through Cancellation Lawsuits in the Commercial Court and Arbitration.

The resolution of trademark disputes involving substantial similarities to registered trademarks constitutes an essential part of the legal protection system for Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) in Indonesia. In practice, the existence of two trademarks that are visually, phonetically, or conceptually similar often causes confusion among the public. Such confusion not only affects consumers who are unable to distinguish the source of goods or services, but also harms the legitimate trademark owner whose mark has been lawfully registered beforehand (Yulianto, 2020).

Therefore, the legal system provides an avenue for the aggrieved trademark owner to seek legal remedies by filing a lawsuit to cancel a trademark registration that is considered to infringe upon their exclusive rights. Two legal pathways are available to resolve such disputes: a trademark cancellation lawsuit in the Commercial Court and dispute resolution through arbitration.

The submission of a trademark cancellation lawsuit is regulated under Article 76 of Law Number 20 of 2016 concerning Trademarks and Geographical Indications, which grants the right to file a claim to prior trademark holders, copyright owners, holders of geographical indications, industrial design owners, as well as interested parties who believe they have been harmed by a trademark registration with substantial similarity.

The lawsuit must be filed with the Commercial Court that holds jurisdiction over the region in which the disputed trademark is registered. In adjudicating the case, the panel of judges considers several factors of similarity between the two trademarks, including graphic appearance, pronunciation, conceptual meaning, and the class of goods or services in question. This process is litigation-based and conducted openly in court, with supporting evidence such as trademark certificates, proof of trademark usage, and analysis of similarity levels and potential consumer confusion.

In practice, the plaintiff is required to prove that the disputed trademark creates a likelihood of confusion among consumers and was registered in bad faith (Putra, 2021). A concrete example can be seen in the case of Buttonsscarves versus Umamascarves (“Putusan No. 3/Pdt.Sus-Merek/2023,” 2023), in which the court ruled to cancel the registration of Umamascarves because it bore substantial similarity to Buttonsscarves and indicated imitation intended to leverage the latter’s popularity (“Putusan No. 3/Pdt.Sus-Merek/2023,” 2023). This case demonstrates the court’s commitment to prioritizing protection for registered trademarks to uphold justice and legal certainty.

Another widely known case is the dispute between MS Glow and PS Glow, in which both parties contested the use of the word “Glow” in their respective cosmetic trademarks. In the decisions issued by the Medan and Surabaya Commercial Courts in 2022, the courts ruled that MS Glow was entitled to use the name, as it had registered the trademark earlier under applicable regulations. Conversely, the registration of PS Glow was declared invalid because it caused public confusion and bore a resemblance to a pre-existing mark. These two cases

illustrate the central role of the Commercial Court in upholding justice and providing legal protection for trademarks in Indonesia.

Although litigation in the Commercial Court remains the primary legal instrument for resolving trademark disputes, the Trademark Law also provides an alternative mechanism through arbitration, as stipulated in Article 93 of the 2016 Trademark Law and more broadly in Law Number 30 of 1999 concerning Arbitration and Alternative Dispute Resolution. Arbitration offers a faster, private resolution process in which decisions are final and binding, thereby allowing parties to avoid lengthy and public litigation procedures (Widyastuti, 2023).

Resolution through arbitration can only occur if there is a prior written agreement between the disputing parties. An arbitration clause is commonly included in trademark license agreements or other business contracts (Kusnadi, 2019). One of the advantages of arbitration is the flexibility to appoint arbitrators with specific expertise in intellectual property, which is expected to result in more accurate and context-appropriate rulings aligned with the nature of the dispute (Arifin, 2023).

However, in practice, the use of arbitration in trademark disputes in Indonesia remains limited (Puspita, 2019). This is primarily due to the low level of understanding among business actors regarding arbitration as a dispute resolution pathway, as well as the lack of outreach and education from relevant institutions such as the Directorate General of Intellectual Property (DGIP). Furthermore, few business contracts explicitly include arbitration clauses as a method of resolving intellectual property disputes, resulting in the underutilization of this mechanism (Fatmawati, 2022).

Considering the characteristics of both mechanisms, it can be concluded that trademark dispute resolution through the Commercial Court offers legal certainty through a formal judicial process, whereas arbitration provides a more efficient, faster, and private alternative. Each pathway has its own strengths and limitations; therefore, the choice of dispute resolution method should align with the parties' needs, the level of urgency, and the agreements previously established. Optimizing both litigation and non-litigation mechanisms will strengthen the trademark protection system in Indonesia and contribute positively to a fair and healthy business environment (Nurfauziah, 2021).

Legal Certainty in Resolving Trademark Disputes Involving Substantial Similarities to Registered Trademarks Through Cancellation Lawsuits in the Commercial Court and Arbitration

Legal certainty is a fundamental principle in a rule-of-law state, ensuring that every citizen's rights and obligations are protected and enforceable through a fair legal system. In the context of trademark disputes, legal certainty is essential to ensure that trademark owners who have lawfully registered their rights can fully enjoy their exclusive rights without interference from other parties registering substantially similar marks. Trademark disputes resolved through the Commercial Court and arbitration essentially aim to uphold this principle of legal certainty (Sutrisno, 2020).

The Commercial Court, as the designated forum for resolving trademark disputes, is regulated under Law Number 20 of 2016 on Trademarks and Geographical Indications, particularly Article 76, which grants the right to file a cancellation lawsuit to parties harmed by the registration of substantially similar trademarks. In practice, the presence of the Commercial Court ensures legal certainty through a formal, objective, and binding judicial process (Undang-Undang (UU) Nomor 20 Tahun 2016 Tentang Merek Dan Indikasi Geografis, 2016). This litigation process guarantees that disputes are examined transparently and that the resulting decisions may serve as jurisprudence and legal precedent for resolving similar cases in the future (Simatupang, 2022).

For instance, in Central Jakarta Commercial Court Decision No. 3/Pdt.Sus-Merek/2023, the judge annulled the registration of the Umamascarves trademark after finding that it bore

substantial similarity to the previously registered Buttonsscarves trademark. In its legal considerations, the court concluded that the similarity in name and product category had the potential to mislead consumers and unjustly benefit the defendant without a legitimate legal basis (“Putusan No. 3/Pdt.Sus-Merek/2023,” 2023). This ruling serves as concrete evidence that the cancellation lawsuit mechanism can provide effective legal protection for trademark owners.

Similarly, in the dispute between MS Glow and PS Glow, the Medan Commercial Court Decision No. 2/Pdt.Sus.HKI/Merek/2022 provided legal certainty to the plaintiff, who had lawfully registered their trademark first. The ruling affirmed that a party who registers a trademark bearing substantial similarity to an existing mark and causes consumer confusion may be subject to legal sanctions in the form of trademark cancellation (“Putusan No. 2/Pdt.Sus.HKI/Merek/2022/PN Niaga Medan Tentang Sengketa Merek Dagang Antara MS Glow Dan PS Glow,” 2022). Thus, litigation through the Commercial Court plays a crucial role in maintaining orderly trademark registration procedures and guaranteeing legal protection. However, in some cases, the effectiveness of legal certainty through the court system still faces challenges, particularly concerning lengthy case proceedings, high litigation costs, and limited judicial understanding of intellectual property matters. Therefore, in addition to the judicial pathway, alternative dispute resolution through arbitration becomes increasingly important to consider.

Arbitration, as a non-litigation mechanism, is governed by Law Number 30 of 1999 on Arbitration and Alternative Dispute Resolution, and is also recognized under Article 93 of the 2016 Trademark Law. Arbitration ensures legal certainty through decisions that are final and binding, and which cannot be challenged through ordinary legal remedies such as appeals or cassation (Undang-Undang (UU) Nomor 30 Tahun 1999 Tentang Arbitrase Dan Alternatif Penyelesaian Sengketa, 1999). This means that once the arbitral award is issued, the parties are obligated to comply without exception, offering a faster form of legal certainty compared to court litigation (Arifin, 2023).

Another advantage of arbitration lies in its private and flexible nature. The parties may appoint arbitrators with specific expertise in the field of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), thereby ensuring a more targeted and appropriate resolution. Arbitration proceedings are also shorter in duration and help reduce negative public exposure for the parties involved in the dispute (Arifin, 2023). In the context of intellectual property disputes, particularly trademark disputes, arbitration is considered one of the most effective resolution methods. According to Darmawan, arbitration offers a swift process, more controlled costs, and final and binding decisions, making it highly suitable for business-related disputes that require prompt resolution (Darmawan, 2020).

Accordingly, the use of arbitration in trademark disputes should be prioritized by business actors, especially in situations that demand confidential and efficient settlement processes. However, as noted by Darmawan, the success of arbitration heavily depends on the existence of an arbitration clause in the initial agreement between the parties. Without such a clause, arbitration cannot be imposed unilaterally, and dispute resolution must revert to litigation (Darmawan, 2020).

In Indonesia, the use of arbitration in trademark disputes remains relatively rare. One of the main barriers is the lack of awareness among business actors about the importance of including arbitration clauses in contracts, as well as insufficient outreach from government institutions regarding this alternative mechanism (Rahmawati, 2022). Additionally, arbitration costs are not always lower than court litigation, and the absence of a dedicated arbitration institution for trademark disputes further limits the optimal use of this pathway.

Considering the characteristics of each resolution pathway, it can be concluded that the Commercial Court offers formal assurance of legal certainty through an open and accountable judicial mechanism. Arbitration, on the other hand, provides a faster, more confidential, and

flexible alternative, yet it requires early preparation and mutual agreement between the parties involved. For both mechanisms to function optimally, support is needed in the form of regulatory updates, enhanced capacity of judges and arbitrators in the field of intellectual property, and intensified outreach to business actors regarding the importance of legal protection for trademarks.

Efforts to strengthen legal certainty in trademark dispute resolution are not only beneficial for trademark owners but also for the national business climate as a whole. An effective legal system that protects trademarks will enhance investor confidence, foster innovation, and promote fair competition in both domestic and global markets.

CONCLUSION

Trademark disputes involving substantial similarities to registered trademarks of other parties may be resolved through two main pathways: by filing a trademark cancellation lawsuit in the Commercial Court or through arbitration. Cancellation lawsuits in the Commercial Court offer formal protection through an open and objective judicial process that results in legally binding decisions. In assessing potential infringements of exclusive rights, the court considers phonetic, visual, and conceptual similarities between the trademarks in question.

On the other hand, arbitration offers a private, expedited, flexible, and final resolution mechanism, prioritizing mutual agreement between the parties to appoint arbitrators with expertise in intellectual property. Despite its numerous advantages, arbitration remains underutilized in trademark disputes in Indonesia due to low awareness among parties and the limited inclusion of arbitration clauses in business contracts.

Legal certainty in trademark dispute resolution is reflected in the regulations governing both mechanisms, as well as in the consistency of judicial and arbitral decisions. However, several challenges persist in practice, particularly regarding lengthy court proceedings, limited dissemination of information about arbitration, and the need to improve the competence of judges and arbitrators in the field of intellectual property.

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