Journal of Management
https://myjournal.or.id/index.php/JOM
E-ISSN: 3026-3239
Vol.2, No.2, July-December (2023),pp.268-282

Co-Branding Strategy in Increasing Consumer Trust: Food Industry Perspective

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Submited :29-10-2023, Accepted : 30-11-2023, Published : 31-12-2023

Abstract

This study aims to analyze co-branding strategies as a marketing approach to enhance consumer trust in food industry products. Co-branding is a collaboration between two or more brands intended to create added value through the synergy of each party's reputation and quality. In the highly competitive food industry, where perceptions of quality and product safety are critical, co-branding is believed to be an effective strategy for strengthening consumer trust. This research employs a qualitative approach using a descriptive method. The results indicate that co-branding strategies in the food industry have proven effective in increasing consumer trust. Collaborations between well-known brands can generate positive perceptions of products, expand market reach, and enhance consumer appeal. Case examples such as Chitato x Indomie and Oreo x Supreme demonstrate that co-branding not only boosts purchase interest but also builds consumer loyalty toward the collaborative products

Keywords: Co-Branding, Consumer Trust, Marketing Strategy, Food Industry, Brand Image

Introduction

In an era of increasingly fierce business competition, companies are required to continuously innovate their marketing strategies in order to attract attention and build consumer loyalty (Nurbani et al., 2019). Today's consumers do not only consider price and quality, but also pay attention to brand value, company image, and the overall experience offered by the products or services they consume. Therefore, it is important for companies to design strategies that not only differentiate their products from competitors but also foster sustainable trust in the minds of consumers (Hermawan, 2015).

One strategy that has been widely adopted by both large and emerging companies in recent decades is co-branding. Co-branding is a collaborative marketing strategy in which two or more brands unite to create a product or service that combines each brand's identity, values, and advantages (Ayu et al., 2022). The main goal of this strategy is to leverage the strengths and reputations of each brand to create synergy that delivers added value to consumers, expands market reach, and enhances competitiveness (Budiarti & Wijayanti, 2023). By combining the

E-ISSN: 3026-3239
Vol.2, No.2, July-December (2023),pp.268-282

unique elements of each brand, co-branding can produce products that are more appealing, trustworthy, and high in value from the consumer's perspective compared to when the brands operate individually. This strategy also fosters strong brand association, where the positive image of one brand can strengthen perceptions of the other (Ashrori & Santosa, 2023).

Co-branding can significantly impact consumer perception, especially in enhancing the positive value of a brand. When two brands with strong reputations and high consumer trust collaborate, the resulting product or service automatically gains additional legitimacy and credibility (Kurniawan et al., 2014). Consumers tend to feel more confident in the quality and advantages of the product because they perceive the combination of values and standards from two trusted brands. This creates a psychological effect that reinforces trust and reduces doubts in the purchase decision-making process. In many cases, consumers are even willing to pay a higher price for co-branded products because they are perceived as more valuable and exclusive (Kusuma & Anita, 2021).

More than just collaboration, co-branding introduces consumers to innovation in the form of new products or services that result from the synergy of ideas, technologies, and brand images. This fusion of brand value not only results in unique product variations but also enriches the consumer experience with the brands (Sudamanto et al., 2023). For example, when a food brand partners with a well-known beverage brand, consumers experience something new while still remaining in their trust zone. Such innovations strengthen the emotional connection between consumers and both brands while also broadening the market reach. In other words, co-branding does not only create new products but also builds stronger positive perceptions and consumer loyalty (Indra, 2015).

In the context of the food industry, co-branding is a highly relevant strategy, as this sector heavily depends on consumers' perceptions of quality, safety, and trust (Nupriyanti & Hurriyati, 2016). Food products labeled as the result of a collaboration between two well-known brands often receive positive responses because they are perceived as more reliable and

E-ISSN: 3026-3239
Vol.2, No.2, July-December (2023),pp.268-282

appealing (Nurcholis et al., 2022). For instance, a collaboration between a fast-food brand and a well-known sauce or beverage brand creates a product that is not only new but also carries added value in the form of guaranteed quality from both parties.

Consumer trust is a critical indicator in determining a brand's success in the market. Through co-branding, consumers tend to associate the positive reputation of one brand with its collaboration partner, thereby accelerating the trust-building process (Syarifah, 2022). This phenomenon, known as the transfer of trust, means that one brand's credibility can enhance the positive perception of its partner brand. Therefore, a deep understanding of how co-branding influences consumer trust is essential for further research (Makkiyah & Hadi, 2024).

Despite its great potential, the implementation of co-branding strategies still presents challenges. One of the main challenges is brand fit—how well the collaborating brands align in terms of values, image, and market segments (Putlia, 2020). If the brands are not well-matched, the collaboration may cause confusion or even damage the image of one of the brands in the eyes of consumers. Thus, the selection of a co-branding partner and the planning of communication strategies are key factors in determining the success of this strategy (Liana, 2019).

This study will examine more deeply how co-branding strategies are applied in the food industry and to what extent they influence the increase of consumer trust. This research is important because there is still a lack of studies that specifically highlight the psychological aspects of consumers—especially in terms of trust—within co-branding strategies in the food sector. The main focus of this study is to identify the key elements of co-branding that most significantly influence the formation of consumer trust.

Therefore, this research is expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions to the development of marketing science, particularly in brand collaboration strategies. Practically, the findings of this study can serve as a guide for food industry players in designing

E-ISSN: 3026-3239
Vol.2, No.2, July-December (2023),pp.268-282

effective co-branding strategies that can enhance competitiveness while building long-term relationships with consumers through solid trust.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to provide an in-depth overview of how co-branding strategies are implemented in the food industry and how these strategies influence consumer trust. This approach was chosen because it allows for a comprehensive exploration of phenomena in real-life contexts, particularly related to the processes, perceptions, and interactions between brands and consumers (Sugiyono, 2016). Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with purposively selected informants, including food industry actors (marketing managers, brand strategists) and consumers who have experienced co-branded products. Additionally, data were gathered through non-participant observation of product promotion activities and documentation such as advertising materials, marketing campaigns, and articles related to brand collaborations.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis techniques, which involve the processes of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The researcher identified key themes emerging from interviews and documentation to understand patterns of effective co-branding strategies and consumer perceptions of brand collaboration. To ensure data validity (Yulianah, 2022), source and method triangulation techniques were employed, comparing results from various types of data and informants. This study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of co-branding practices in building consumer trust in the food industry, as well as the supporting and hindering factors influencing their success.

Results and Discussion

Co-branding strategies in the food industry have become an increasingly popular approach due to their ability to create synergy between two brands that each possess strong reputations and consumer trust. When two well-known brands collaborate on a single product, consumer confidence in the product’s quality and credibility rises significantly. Consumers tend

E-ISSN: 3026-3239
Vol.2, No.2, July-December (2023),pp.268-282

to feel more assured and secure when purchasing products involving brands they already trust, which in turn accelerates their decision-making process. Furthermore, co-branding can create a perception of exclusivity, as collaborative products are often seen as unique and of higher value.

Moreover, co-branding in the food industry can also expand market reach by integrating each brand's consumer segments. For example, when a snack brand collaborates with a well-known sauce brand, it not only strengthens their individual market positions but also attracts new customers who are loyal to their partner brand. With increased brand awareness and a positive perception of the collaboration, customer loyalty toward both brands is likely to grow. This strategy not only benefits short-term marketing goals but also lays a foundation for long-term relationships between brands and consumers, ultimately generating sustainable added value for the company.

Here are several co-branding strategies that can be used:

1. **Combining Brand Strengths**

In the highly competitive food industry, building consumer trust is a major challenge for every brand. Co-branding emerges as an innovative solution by merging the strengths of two or more well-established brands. This collaboration not only presents a new product to the market but also strengthens the positive consumer perception regarding quality, safety, and credibility. When consumers see two trusted brands working together, they are more likely to try the product without hesitation, assuming that each brand’s quality will be maintained.

Consumer trust increases even more because co-branding offers a kind of double assurance. For instance, when a popular instant noodle brand teams up with a beloved chili sauce brand, consumers feel confident that the taste and quality of the product will meet their expectations. They see co-branded products as a result of high-quality standards from both sides. Thus, this strategy becomes a powerful tool to enhance consumer loyalty, especially in the food market where brand perception and customer experience play key roles.

E-ISSN: 3026-3239
Vol.2, No.2, July-December (2023),pp.268-282

Besides building trust, co-branding also contributes significantly to increasing product value. Co-branded food products are often seen as more attractive and exclusive because they combine the strengths of two renowned brands. An example would be a collaboration between a premium chocolate brand and an ice cream producer, which creates new limited-edition flavors. The added value not only comes from a more complex and unique taste but also from the perception that the product is a limited innovation worth trying before it disappears from the market.

The value created through co-branding ultimately has a positive impact on the image of both brands. Consumers view both companies as adaptive, creative, and capable of delivering enjoyable new experiences. This is crucial in the food industry, where product variety and flavor innovation are key to maintaining market interest. As such, co-branding not only expands consumer reach but also strengthens the brand's position in the minds of consumers as relevant, trustworthy, and high-value names.

2. Expanding Market Reach

One of the main advantages of co-branding in the food industry is its ability to significantly broaden market reach. When two brands collaborate, they are not only merging products but also their separately built customer bases. This enables each brand to access new audiences that they might not have reached independently. For example, if one brand is more popular among teenagers and the other appeals to young adults, their collaboration can bridge these two market segments, opening wider growth opportunities.

Co-branding is also effective in boosting brand awareness. In the food industry, brand awareness is vital because product competition is fierce, and consumers tend to choose familiar brands. By sharing exposure and distribution networks, both brands can introduce themselves to each other's consumers. Customers who were previously loyal to only one brand may become more open to trying products from its partner due to positive brand association. This creates a snowball effect where awareness increases, and with it, the chances of repeat purchases.

E-ISSN: 3026-3239
Vol.2, No.2, July-December (2023),pp.268-282

A concrete example of the success of this strategy is the collaboration between Indomie and Chitato, two highly popular snack brands in Indonesia. Their co-branded product, Chitato Rasa Indomie Goreng (Chitato with Indomie Fried Noodles flavor), captured public attention by combining two favorite tastes into one product. This collaboration not only generated high sales but also attracted a broader audience, including consumers who had previously not been interested in either potato chips or instant noodles. As a result, both brands increased consumer engagement and generated significant buzz on social media and digital platforms.

Such successful collaborations show that co-branding in the food industry is not only about flavor innovation, but also a strategic way to smartly extend brand reach. By leveraging each brand's strengths and combining their audiences, companies can create new, exciting products, expand market share, and reinforce their brand positioning amid intense competition. Therefore, co-branding is a strategic marketing tool for maintaining brand relevance and sustainability in the eyes of evolving consumers.

3. Creating a Unique Experience

One of the main attractions of co-branding strategies is their ability to create unique consumer experiences through innovative products or services. In the food industry, consumer experience is closely tied to taste, appearance, and the story behind a product. When two different brands collaborate to create something new, the result often delivers a combination of flavors or concepts that have never existed before. This creates curiosity and excitement among consumers to try the product, which in turn increases the chances of market adoption.

Co-branded food products usually bring a high element of surprise and creativity. For example, a collaboration between a tea beverage brand and an ice cream brand can result in a trendy tea-flavored ice cream variant that is not only refreshing but also aesthetically pleasing and offers a new sensation. This kind of uniqueness gives consumers a reason to explore the product further and share it on social media, amplifying its viral potential and promotional

E-ISSN: 3026-3239
Vol.2, No.2, July-December (2023),pp.268-282

reach. This new experience strengthens the emotional connection between consumers and brands, which is crucial for building loyalty in the fast-changing food market.

Beyond the product itself, the power of messaging built from the cooperation of two brands also plays a significant role in co-branding. When two brands unite their vision and values in a single marketing campaign, the message conveyed to consumers becomes stronger and more meaningful. For instance, a collaboration between a healthy food brand and an environmental organization can highlight a sustainability message that touches on the emotional and ethical aspects of consumers. With a stronger narrative, co-branding doesn't just sell a product—it sells a lifestyle and values that can inspire consumers to feel like they're part of something bigger.

In the end, co-branding is not merely a strategy to sell unique food products but a way to shape deeper, more enjoyable, and memorable consumer experiences. These experiences are what differentiate a brand from its competitors. In an era where consumers increasingly seek added value and the stories behind products, the ability to create unique experiences through co-branding can be a significant differentiator and a long-term strategic asset for brands in the food industry.

4. Building Consumer Trust

Consumer trust is a key element in the long-term success of a brand, especially in the food industry, which is highly sensitive to issues of quality, safety, and reputation. Co-branding strategies become an effective tool for building that trust, particularly when two brands with positive images come together. The association between two brands that already have market loyalty creates the perception that the collaborative product is not only innovative but also trustworthy and safe to consume. The combination of the two brands' strengths automatically instills greater confidence in consumers, even before they try the product.

The positive association resulting from the collaboration of two trusted brands can strengthen consumer perception of product quality. In the food industry, taste, ingredient

E-ISSN: 3026-3239
Vol.2, No.2, July-December (2023),pp.268-282

quality, cleanliness, and nutritional value are key considerations for consumers. When two brands known for their commitment to quality and high standards create a joint product, consumers are more likely to believe that these standards are upheld. This speeds up the product's acceptance in the market and encourages greater consumer interest without significant hesitation.

Furthermore, co-branding plays a key role in enhancing the credibility of the brands involved. A brand that was previously less well-known can gain public validation simply by partnering with an established brand. For example, a local food brand collaborating with an international brand will appear more credible in the eyes of consumers, as it is perceived to have undergone some form of selection or vetting process. In this case, the reputation of the partner brand acts as a "quality guarantee" that influences consumer judgment toward the emerging brand.

This boost in credibility also extends consumer trust into other aspects of the brand, such as service, ethical values, and innovation. Consumers who previously only trusted one brand may begin to trust the partner brand as well, due to the association with the same "class" or standards. In the context of the food industry, this is crucial because it touches on both the emotional and rational sides of consumers—such as the belief that the product is safe for families, uses quality ingredients, or is processed hygienically.

The trust built through co-branding strategies ultimately leads directly to increased consumer loyalty. After having a positive experience with a collaborative product, consumers are more likely to continue purchasing it or even explore other offerings from both brands. In the long term, this creates a strong emotional bond, as consumers not only rely on the product's quality but also feel engaged in the story or collaboration between their two favorite brands.

Thus, co-branding strategies in the food industry not only strengthen a brand's market position but also serve as an emotional bridge between the brand and its consumers. As consumer trust increases, the opportunity to create long-lasting loyalty also grows. In a dynamic

E-ISSN: 3026-3239
Vol.2, No.2, July-December (2023),pp.268-282

industry, building trust through co-branding can be one of the most effective strategic steps to maintain market share and grow a loyal customer community.

Some examples of co-branding strategies in the food industry in Indonesia include:

- **Chitato and Indomie**

The collaboration between Chitato and Indomie is a clear example of a successful co-branding strategy in Indonesia's food industry. Although they come from different product categories—Chitato as potato chips and Indomie as instant noodles—they successfully merged their strong and widely recognized flavor identities. The launch of Chitato with Indomie Goreng flavor was a major breakthrough that immediately caught the market's attention. The flavor, which closely resembles the iconic Indomie Goreng instant noodles, made the product attractive not only in terms of flavor innovation but also emotionally connected consumers with a familiar eating experience. The elements of nostalgia and curiosity motivated a wide range of consumers, from youth to adults, to try the product, making it go viral and quickly dominate the snack market.

The success of the first variant led to an expanded collaboration through the Chitato Lite product with Ayam Bawang (Onion Chicken) flavor, which also adopted one of Indomie's most popular variants. Through this strategy, the co-branding between Indomie and Chitato not only resulted in a unique product but also strengthened brand awareness and consumer loyalty toward both brands. Consumers saw this collaboration as a symbol of innovation relevant to local tastes, further solidifying their position in a highly competitive market. This strategy proves that when two strong and complementary brands work together, they not only create commercially attractive products but also new consumption experiences that leave a lasting impression on consumers.

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E-ISSN: 3026-3239
Vol.2, No.2, July-December (2023),pp.268-282

Figure 1 Co-branding results between Chitato and Indomie

- **Oreo with Supreme**

The collaboration between Oreo and Supreme is one of the most phenomenal examples of co-branding strategies that combines the world of food and streetwear fashion. Oreo, as an iconic biscuit brand that is widely known in various circles, collaborated with Supreme—an exclusive fashion brand with a very loyal fan base—to create a red Oreo variant with a striking Supreme logo in the middle of the biscuit. The launch of this product in March 2020 immediately stole the public's attention, not only because of its unusual appearance, but also because of the exclusivity it carries. This product is sold in very limited quantities and is only available in certain distribution channels, making it a target for collectors and fans of both brands.

This co-branding not only produces ordinary food products, but also creates a pop culture sensation that goes viral globally. The presence of Oreo x Supreme coincides with the temporary closure of a number of Supreme physical stores in various major cities around the world due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which actually strengthens the narrative of the exclusivity and rarity of this product. The much higher selling price compared to regular Oreos did not discourage consumer interest, in fact this product was resold in the secondary market at a price many times higher. This collaboration shows how strategically designed co-branding can

E-ISSN: 3026-3239
Vol.2, No.2, July-December (2023),pp.268-282

strengthen brand identity, expand cross-industry markets, and create a high value perception that can build loyalty as well as extraordinary marketing buzz.

Figure 2 Oreo's co-branding with Supreme

Co-branding is a marketing strategy that has proven effective in strengthening brand positioning amid increasingly fierce market competition, especially in the food industry. By combining the strengths of two well-established brands, companies can significantly enhance consumer trust. This collaboration not only expands market reach and increases brand awareness but also creates positive associations that deliver unique experiences and added value for consumers. When implemented correctly and aligned with the identity and values of both brands, this strategy can become a key factor in building long-term customer loyalty and driving sustainable competitiveness. Therefore, co-branding is not merely a temporary promotional tool but also a long-term strategy for creating differentiation and stronger brand equity in the minds of consumers.

Conclusion

Based on the description that has been explained, it can be concluded that the co-branding strategy is a very potential marketing approach in building consumer trust, especially in the food industry. By combining the strengths of two or more brands that already have a good reputation, companies are able to create products or services that are not only unique but also bring added value in the eyes of consumers. This combination of brand identities produces

E-ISSN: 3026-3239
Vol.2, No.2, July-December (2023),pp.268-282

synergy that can increase positive perceptions and strengthen product credibility in the market. The co-branding strategy has also proven effective in expanding market reach and increasing brand awareness. When two brands with different consumer bases collaborate, they introduce each other's audiences to each other, resulting in wider exposure. Examples such as Chitato x Indomie and Oreo x Supreme show that this strategy not only creates innovative products, but is also able to create strong marketing buzz, drive curiosity, and even create trends among consumers. Furthermore, co-branding can create a unique and memorable consumption experience, which ultimately drives consumer loyalty to both brands involved. The positive association of each brand, plus the impression of exclusivity and product innovation, are the main factors that strengthen consumers' emotional relationships with products. If done with the right strategy and timing, co-branding is not just a collaboration, but a strategic step that can increase competitiveness, expand the market, and maintain brand relevance amidst the ever-changing dynamics of the industry.

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