CURRENT ADVANCED RESEARCH ON SHARIA FINANCE AND ECONOMIC WORLDWIDE (CASHFLOW)

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF BRAND AMBASSADORS IN SHAPING BRAND EQUITY: INSIGHTS FROM THE BEAUTY SECTOR

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the relationship between brand ambassadors and brand equity in the beauty industry, focusing on Somethinc, an Indonesian skincare brand. Using a quantitative research approach, data were collected through surveys distributed to 45 respondents who are followers of Somethinc's Instagram account. The analysis employed path analysis and various statistical tests, including normality, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity tests, to ensure the robustness of the results. The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between brand ambassadors and brand equity, with the model explaining 48% of the variance in brand equity. Specifically, the presence of a brand ambassador significantly influenced consumer perceptions, contributing to increased brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand associations. This study highlights the importance of strategic celebrity endorsements in enhancing brand equity, particularly in the competitive beauty sector. The results contribute to a deeper understanding of how brand ambassadors can be leveraged to strengthen brand positioning and consumer trust.

Keywords: *Brand Ambassadors, Brand Equity, Celebrity Endorsement, Beauty Industry, Consumer Behavior*

1. INTRODUCTION

The beauty industry in Indonesia has seen significant growth and development, leading to increased competition among brands. As the market expands, brands are required to adopt unique and innovative marketing strategies to stand out. One such strategy that has been widely used for years is the involvement of brand ambassadors, including both celebrities and non-celebrities (Seno & Lukas, 2007). Brand ambassadors often serve as the face of a brand, significantly influencing consumer behavior by encouraging them to purchase or use the products (N. P. Dewi & Supriyanto, 2017; H. Firmansyah, 2019). According to Doucett (2008), a brand ambassador not only has a passion for the brand but also actively promotes and shares information about the brand, thus motivating potential customers to try the product. Percy & Rossiter (1997) assert that brand ambassadors help deliver the message of a product or service effectively to the target audience. In the beauty industry, celebrities or public figures are often chosen as brand ambassadors, as their popularity and reach help boost the brand's visibility (Royan, 2004). However, it is crucial to ensure that these figures can communicate the product's message effectively so that consumers easily remember and identify with the brand.

The use of brand ambassadors has been a common practice for increasing brand awareness and sales. This practice is especially prevalent when using well-known celebrities, as their endorsement is believed to enhance the perceived value of a brand (Dwivedi et al., 2015; Seno & Lukas, 2007). Several studies have explored the effects of brand ambassadors and endorsers on brand recall, brand image, purchase intention, and

other branding indicators. However, research focusing on the direct and indirect relationship between brand ambassadors and brand equity is still limited (Dwivedi et al., 2015; Seno & Lukas, 2007). Given the significant costs involved in hiring a brand ambassador, it is important for brands to understand the relationship between their ambassador and the brand equity generated. This understanding ensures that marketing investments are utilized effectively (Dwivedi et al., 2015).

Brand equity is a well-established concept in marketing, defined by Aaker (2009) as the collection of assets and debts connected to a brand's name and emblem can impact the brand's overall value. Various measures such as brand recognition, brand connections, perceived excellence, and brand devotion can be used to quantify it. Previous research has demonstrated that brand ambassadors can directly (Sivanandamoorthy, 2013; Tjokrosaputro & Ongkowidjaja, 2020) or indirectly influence brand equity (Dwivedi et al., 2015; Dwivedi & Johnson, 2013; Seno & Lukas, 2007; Spry et al., 2011; Vidyanata, 2019).

Somethinc, a rising local skincare brand in Indonesia, has made significant strides in the beauty market. Founded in 2019, Somethinc offers a wide range of skincare products, including its popular serums and body care treatments. The brand was launched on Beauty Haul, an e-commerce platform that specializes in beauty products. Somethinc's core values are reflected in its acronym C.R.E.A.T.E., which emphasizes collaboration with consumers, as well as being unique, agile, persistent, and efficient (Boulin & Louise, 2022). In line with its commitment to quality, Somethinc's products are 100% halal certified. Initially, Somethinc's product line featured three serums: the HYALuronic B5 Serum, Niacinamide + Moisture Beet Serum, and AHA BHA PHA Peeling Solution Serum. These products gained popularity quickly, with Somethinc being recognized as the "local version of The Ordinary" and awarded Best Newcomer Local Brand by Female Daily in 2019.

The decision to select Somethinc for this study stems from its clear mission to meet the skincare needs of young consumers who are just beginning their skincare routines and are often overwhelmed by the variety of products available (Hasena & Sakapurnama, 2021). The brand has also gained substantial social media attention, with over 1.34 million followers on Instagram as of April 2022. As the number of local beauty brands in Indonesia continues to rise (Buana, 2021), Somethinc has worked to stay relevant by collaborating with popular figures and staying on top of trends.

In early 2022, Somethinc made waves in the industry by announcing its partnership with NCT Dream, a popular South Korean boy band, as its brand ambassador. The collaboration was revealed through social media previews, generating excitement and consumer engagement. According to an interview with Marsela Limesa, Somethinc's co-founder, both the brand and NCT Dream share similar principles, such as growth, loyalty, and a focus on empowering their audiences (Novita, 2022). This partnership is an example of how brand ambassadors can align with a brand's core values and effectively reach the target market.

As the beauty market in Indonesia becomes increasingly competitive and the use of brand ambassadors continues to be a dominant marketing strategy (Febrian & Fadly, 2021; Rahma et al., 2022), the purpose of this research is to investigate how brand ambassadors influence brand equity. By investigating this phenomenon through the case of Somethinc, the research aims to offer valuable perspectives on the impact of brand ambassadors on brand value in the beauty sector.

Prior studies have indicated that brand ambassadors have the ability to influence brand value, whether it be through direct means or in a more subtle manner (Dwivedi et al., 2015; Jaffari et al., 2014; Ongkowidjaja & Tjokrosaputro, 2020). The use of brand ambassadors, particularly in industries such as cosmetics, plays a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions and fostering brand loyalty, which ultimately affects brand equity. However, while the direct relationship between brand ambassadors and brand equity has been well established, there is limited research exploring this dynamic in the context of newer local beauty brands in Indonesia.

In light of the growing beauty industry in Indonesia, it has become increasingly important for brands to differentiate themselves through effective marketing strategies. One such strategy is the use of brand ambassadors, especially those with strong public followings, to enhance the brand's image and increase consumer trust. For example, Somethinc, a rising beauty brand in Indonesia, has leveraged the popularity of celebrities and influencers to promote its products, aiming to increase brand recognition and loyalty.

The primary objective of this research is to analyze the immediate impact that brand ambassadors have on the overall value of a brand, specifically for Somethinc, a local beauty brand that has gained significant attention since its launch in 2019. By examining how brand ambassadors' impact Somethinc's brand equity, this research seeks to provide insights into the effectiveness of this marketing strategy within the Indonesian beauty industry.

The main focus of this investigation is to determine whether employing a brand ambassador has a significant effect on brand equity within the realm of Somethinc beauty products. This research seeks to reveal the direct connection between brand ambassadors and brand equity, providing insight into the ways in which brand ambassadors can shape brand worth and customer devotion within the beauty sector.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The use of a brand ambassador, particularly a public figure, has long been recognized as an effective marketing strategy. Brand ambassadors serve as the face of a brand, and their presence can significantly impact consumer behavior, often influencing potential buyers to choose or engage with a particular product (R. Dewi, 2017; F. Firmansyah, 2019). According to (Doucett, 2008), a brand ambassador typically has a deep passion for the brand they represent. They actively promote the brand, often sharing information voluntarily, which increases the likelihood that potential consumers will be persuaded to use the product. (F. Firmansyah, 2019) further asserts that brand ambassadors play a pivotal role in driving sales through effective communication with the public, especially when they promote the brand to which they are assigned.

One of the most widely used frameworks for measuring the impact of a brand ambassador is the VisCAP Model, developed by Percy & Rossiter (1997). This model consists of various dimensions that allow marketers to assess the effectiveness of a brand ambassador, including:

a) Visibility refers to how well-known or popular a brand ambassador is within the public sphere. The higher the visibility of the ambassador, the more attention the associated product will attract. A highly visible ambassador makes the brand stand out and increases the likelihood that the target audience will engage with it (Nofiawaty et al., 2020).

b) Credibility encompasses the perceived expertise and trustworthiness of the brand ambassador. A credible ambassador is seen as knowledgeable and reliable, which fosters consumer trust and confidence in the brand being promoted.
- Expertise refers to the ambassador's knowledge and experience, which are critical in forming a strong brand association, especially for high-involvement products (Aprilia, 2009; Nofiawaty et al., 2020).
- Objectivity is crucial for high-involvement products, where an objective and unbiased presentation of information helps build consumer confidence (Aprilia, 2009; Nofiawaty et al., 2020).

c) Attraction refers to both physical and non-physical qualities of the brand ambassador, such as their intellectual appeal, persona, lifestyle, and other attributes that resonate with the target audience.
- Likeability indicates how well the ambassador is liked by the public, which can significantly influence consumer behavior.
- Similarity is the measure of how closely the brand ambassador's lifestyle, personality, and beliefs match those of the target audience, thereby increasing the brand's appeal to consumers.

d) Power relates to the ability of the brand ambassador to influence consumer purchasing decisions. A powerful brand ambassador can increase consumer desire to purchase the promoted product (Aprilia, 2009; Nancy et al., 2020).

2.1. Brand Equity

The idea of brand equity is crucial in today's marketing landscape, as it signifies the extra worth that a brand contributes to its offerings. According to Aaker (2009), brand equity refers to the collection of resources or debts associated with a brand's title and emblem, which can heighten or diminish the worth supplied by the brand. Similarly, Emari et al. (2012) argue that brand equity represents the additional value created by consumer perceptions and attitudes toward a brand, which ultimately impacts market share, pricing, and profitability.

Several metrics can be utilized to gauge brand equity, such as loyalty to the brand, the level of recognition it enjoys, the perceived quality of the brand, and the associations tied to the brand. These indicators help to assess how consumers think, feel, and act toward a brand and its products. A company can benefit from increased financial performance and customer loyalty in the long run by having a strong brand equity (Emari et al., 2012).

2.2. Relationship Between Brand Ambassador and Brand Equity

There has been extensive research conducted on the correlation between brand ambassadors and brand equity. As discussed earlier, brand equity signifies the power of a brand in the market and demonstrates its capacity to drive sustainable revenue and earnings over time. Research by Dwivedi et al. (2015); Jaffari et al. (2014); Tjokrosaputro & Ongkowidjaja (2020) confirms that brand ambassadors have the potential to greatly influence the perceived value of a brand, whether through direct or indirect means. Specifically, brand ambassadors can help shape consumer perceptions, increase brand awareness, and influence purchasing behavior, which in turn boosts brand equity.

Sivanandamoorthy (2013) implies that a strong connection exists between brand ambassadors and brand value, but this connection may be affected by factors like the

credibility of the brand. In contrast, other studies have found that brand ambassadors have a more substantial impact on brand equity when mediated by additional variables (R. Dewi, 2017; Dwivedi & Johnson, 2013; Seno & Lukas, 2007; Spry et al., 2011). These studies highlight the importance of other factors in enhancing the effectiveness of brand ambassadors.

Research by Dwivedi et al. (2015) and Ongkowidjaja & Tjokrosaputro (2020) suggest that brand ambassadors can greatly impact brand equity through their alignment with the values of the brand. The consumer's perception of the ambassador plays a key role in shaping the overall perception of the brand. Thus, a brand ambassador who effectively embodies the brand's identity can positively influence brand equity.

On the other hand, some studies indicate that the direct impact of brand ambassadors on brand equity is less significant if the ambassador does not strongly align with the brand's target audience or if the brand's messaging lacks clarity. For example, Spry et al. (2011) argue that the effectiveness of a brand ambassador may not always result in a measurable increase in brand equity unless the ambassador's image and message resonate strongly with the target market. Similarly, Dewi (2017) found that brand ambassadors alone may not be sufficient to influence brand equity without the proper support from other brand-building activities.

Despite mixed findings, the general consensus in the literature is that brand ambassadors, when selected strategically, can directly impact brand equity by enhancing consumer perceptions, increasing brand awareness, and fostering brand loyalty. This relationship is particularly relevant in industries like cosmetics, where emotional connections and brand image are crucial for success.

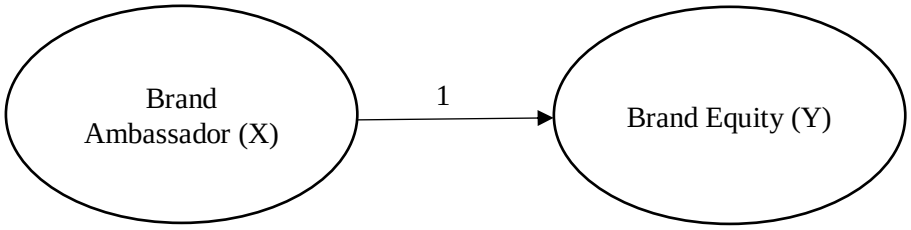


Figure 1. Research Model

3. RESEARCH METHODS

3.1. Research Paradigm

This study follows the positivist paradigm, with the goal of scientifically examining the connection between brand ambassador and brand equity. The reason for choosing the positivist approach is to investigate if there is a direct link between these two factors and to evaluate the importance of the relationship between brand ambassador and brand equity. According to Neuman (2014), the positivist paradigm focuses on hypothesis testing to identify measurable relationships.

3.2. Approach

The study utilizes a quantitative methodology and employs deductive logic, meaning the study begins with a theory or hypothesis to be tested, followed by data collection to either confirm or reject the hypothesis. A quantitative approach is suitable for this research because it results in numerical data that allows for objective statistical

analysis (Miller & Brewer, 2003). This approach enables the researcher to identify patterns, test relationships between variables, and make predictions based on the findings (Neuman, 2014).

3.3. Method: Survey

The research utilizes a survey method, which allows the researcher to gather data on people's opinions through questionnaire responses. The approach of using an analytic survey will be applied to elucidate and clarify the prevailing social trend, particularly focusing on investigating the correlation between the endorsement of NCT Dream as brand ambassadors and the utilization of Somethinc beauty products. This approach is suitable as it seeks to evaluate the connection between different factors and derive conclusions based on the identified associations (Morissan, 2012; Weisberg, 2005).

3.4. Measurement Scale

The research employs the Likert scale, with a range of values from 1 to 5. This scale is used to measure concepts that have been defined operationally, such as visibility, credibility, attraction, and power related to the brand ambassador, as well as brand equity related to consumer perceptions of the Somethinc brand. The Likert scale allows respondents to indicate their level of agreement with statements, from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1) (Bettega, 2016; Sekaran, 2016). The use of a 5-point Likert scale is preferred because it is easier for respondents to distinguish between choices compared to a 7-point scale, which might confuse them (Hair et al., 2006).

3.5. Population and Sample

This study includes individuals who actively use Instagram and are followers of the official Somethinc account on the platform. According to the latest data from WeAreSocial (2024), there are 191.4 million active Instagram users in Indonesia, with the majority being in the age range of 18 to 34 years. Based on data released by the Somethinc Instagram account, as of April 2024, the account has approximately 1.5 million followers. This population is selected because they are the most relevant group to the product being promoted, which is beauty products widely used by teenagers and young adults.

In this research, a method of sampling known as probability sampling is utilized, specifically employing the simple random sampling approach. By utilizing this technique, each member of the population is given an equal opportunity to be chosen for the sample. Simple random sampling is the right choice because the entire population includes all Somethinc Instagram account followers, which numbered 1.5 million as of April 2024. This sampling method helps to represent the target population accurately and provides the opportunity for generalization of the results.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Respondent Profile

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 45)

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	15	33.33%
	Female	30	66.67%
Age	18-24 years	20	44.44%
	25-34 years	15	33.33%
	35-44 years	7	15.56%
	45 years and above	3	6.67%
Occupation	Student	18	40.00%
	Employed	22	48.89%
	Entrepreneur	4	8.89%
	Other	1	2.22%
Education Level	High School	5	11.11%
	Undergraduate	25	55.56%
	Graduate	15	33.33%
Brand Familiarity	Somethinc Users	45	100%
	Non-Users	0	0%

4.2. Validity and Reliability Results

Table 2. Validity and Reliability of Brand Ambassador Indicators (VisCAP Model)

Indicator	Item	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted	Cronbach's Alpha (Overall)	Validity Status
Visibility	V 1	0.602	0.832	0.878	Valid
	V 2	0.635	0.821		Valid
	V 3	0.672	0.810		Valid
Credibility	C 1	0.698	0.812		Valid
	C 2	0.654	0.824		Valid
	C 3	0.711	0.805		Valid
Attraction	A 1	0.731	0.798		Valid
	A 2	0.694	0.807		Valid
	A 3	0.675	0.811		Valid
Power	P 1	0.720	0.801		Valid
	P 2	0.680	0.813		Valid
	P 3	0.690	0.810		Valid
Overall Alpha				**0.877**	**Valid**

This particular design consists of four unique aspects (Brand Loyalty, Brand Awareness, Perceived Quality, and Brand Associations), with three elements each, resulting in a grand total of twelve elements. Following the corrected correlations and

alpha values, it is evident that the elements hold validity and the scale displays strong internal cohesion.

4.3. Results of Classical Assumptions Testing

In order to test the normality of the residuals, a Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was performed, and the result showed the following:

- Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z-value: 0.094
- Sig. value: 0.200 ($p > 0.05$)

Because the p-value exceeds 0.05, we cannot dismiss the null hypothesis, suggesting that the residuals follow a normal distribution. This confirms that the normality assumption is met. Additionally, the histogram shows a bell-shaped curve, further supporting the finding that the data follows a normal distribution.

The use of the multicollinearity test is to determine if there are strong associations among the independent variables. The findings from the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and Tolerance are as listed below:

- Tolerance for Substructure I: 1.000 (greater than 0.1)
- VIF for Substructure I: 1.000 (less than 10)

The value measurements suggest that there is no issue with multicollinearity, as the tolerance values surpass 0.1 and the VIF values are under 10. Based on these findings, it can be inferred that there are no concerns regarding multicollinearity within the regression analysis, demonstrating that the independent variables are not closely correlated with each other.

The Breusch-Pagan/Cook-Weisberg test for heteroscedasticity was conducted, and the results are as follows:

- Chi-square value: 0.214
- p-value: 0.644 ($p > 0.05$)

Since the p-value exceeds 0.05, we are unable to reject the null hypothesis, suggesting that there is no evidence of heteroscedasticity in the data. This confirms that the homoscedasticity assumption is satisfied. This implies that the residual variance remains consistent across different levels of the independent variables, meeting the homoscedasticity requirement for regression analysis. Based on these results, the assumptions of normality, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity are met. The data is suitable for further regression analysis.

4.4. Path Analysis

In this research, a Path Analysis was carried out to investigate the connection between the variable that operates independently (Brand Ambassador) and the variable that depends on it (Brand Equity). The analysis was designed to ascertain the direct impact of Brand Ambassador on Brand Equity.

4.4.1. Adjusted R-Square (R^2) Calculation

The Adjusted R-Square value serves as a measure of how effectively the independent variable (Brand Ambassador) accounts for the fluctuations in the dependent variable (Brand Equity). The findings reveal an R^2 of 0.48, corresponding to 48%. This implies that nearly half, or 48%, of the fluctuations in Brand Equity can be elucidated by the Brand Ambassador variable. The remaining 52% is attributed to other factors not

measured in this study, which may include other marketing efforts, or external factors influencing brand equity.

4.4.2. T-Test for Path Coefficients

The T-test is used to examine whether the path coefficient of a given independent variable (Brand Ambassador) is statistically significant in predicting the dependent variable (Brand Equity). The test results for Brand Ambassador are as follows:

- Significance value (p-value): 0.000 ($p < 0.05$)
- T-Statistic: 9.619
- Critical value (t-table): 1.960

The statistical analysis shows that the relationship between Brand Ambassador and Brand Equity is significant as the p-value is below 0.05 and the t-statistic exceeds the t-table value. This indicates that Brand Ambassador directly influences Brand Equity in a significant way.

4.5. Discussion

Based on the results of the hypothesis testing conducted in this study, the following decision-making guidelines were applied:

a) If the probability value (sig) is greater than 0.05, then H_0 (Null Hypothesis) is accepted, and H_a (Alternative Hypothesis) is rejected.
b) If the probability value (sig) is less than 0.05, then H_0 is rejected, and H_a is accepted.

The hypothesis (H_1) tested is that there is a significant relationship between Brand Ambassador and Brand Equity. With a p-value of 0.000 (less than 0.05), H_0 is rejected, and H_a is accepted based on the decision rule. Thus, the results prove that there is a significant relationship between Brand Ambassador and Brand Equity, and therefore, H_1 is supported.

The findings of this research align with previous studies, such as those conducted by Dwivedi et al. (2015); Tjokrosaputro & Ongkowidjaja (2020), which also found significant relationships between Brand Ambassador and Brand Equity. The results indicate that Brand Ambassadors play a significant role in enhancing the Brand Equity of a product or service, as they help to influence consumer purchasing behavior and improve brand perception.

5. CONCLUSION

The findings from the hypothesis testing indicate that brand ambassadors play a vital role in influencing brand equity in a favorable way. The research showed that brand ambassadors are essential for boosting brand recognition, perceived excellence, customer loyalty, and brand connections, which are crucial aspects of brand equity. This finding aligns with previous studies that have confirmed the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements and brand ambassadors in improving brand equity.

This research highlights opportunities for further exploration in academic studies. Future research could investigate mediating variables such as customer loyalty, brand trust, and engagement with the brand ambassador's image to understand how brand ambassadors influence brand equity. Employing structural equation modeling (SEM) could provide insights into these indirect relationships. Additionally, comparative studies across industries, such as cosmetics, fashion, and technology, are recommended to

determine if the impact of brand ambassadors on brand equity differs by sector. This cross-industry analysis could offer a nuanced understanding of celebrity endorsements' effectiveness in various product categories.

Businesses, particularly in the beauty industry, can benefit from actionable insights based on this study. Selecting brand ambassadors whose public image aligns with the brand's identity and values is crucial, as authenticity and trustworthiness significantly enhance brand loyalty and awareness. Furthermore, leveraging social media platforms to amplify the reach and impact of brand ambassadors is essential. Engaging in regular interactions, collaborations, and sponsored posts on social media can boost consumer engagement and positively influence brand equity.

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