

Strengthening Consumer Trust Through Co-Branding in the Food Industry: A Strategic Marketing Perspective

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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 wellknown brands can generate positive perceptions of products, expand market reach, and enhance consumer appeal. Case examples such as The Botol Sosro x Re.Juve and Gojek x McDonald Indonesia 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 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 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 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 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 wellknown 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 longterm 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.

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.

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 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

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

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:

a. Teh Botol Sosro and Re.juve

The collaboration between Teh Botol Sosro, a legendary ready-to-drink tea brand in Indonesia, and Re.juve, a premium cold-pressed juice brand, presents a unique and strategic cross-segment co-branding example. Although both brands come from different product categories—Teh Botol Sosro is known for its traditional appeal, while Re.juve represents modern healthy lifestyle choices—the two joined forces to launch the "Herbal Refresh" campaign. This campaign offered a fusion of classic tea flavors with natural cold-pressed fruit elements.

This innovative flavor combination attracted consumers seeking healthy beverage alternatives without sacrificing traditional taste. The collaboration did not merely produce a new product but blended the values of heritage and modern wellness. Loyal consumers of Teh Botol were intrigued by the novelty, while Re.juve customers saw it as a new healthy option with cultural relevance.

This co-branding strategy significantly enhanced the innovative image of both brands. Through social media marketing and in-store sampling in Re.juve outlets, the product quickly gained traction among urban youth and the health-conscious middle-class market. It illustrates that a well-aligned cross-segment collaboration can generate strong synergy, create added-value experiences, and build loyalty beyond each brand's original customer base.

b. Gojek and McDonald's Indonesia

Another successful co-branding example is the partnership between Gojek, Indonesia's leading on-demand service platform, and McDonald's Indonesia, a major player in the fast-food industry. Through the "GoFood Signature X McD" campaign, Gojek offered exclusive

McDonald's menu items available only via the GoFood application, such as the Spicy Chicken McD GoFood Edition and special bundled menus.

This collaboration created a powerful combination: Gojek represents accessibility and delivery speed, while McDonald's stands for global consistency and quality. The strategy not only increased transactions on both platforms but also enhanced customer engagement through the app, loyalty programs, and real-time notification features.

The impact on consumer trust was notable. The exclusivity of the menu on GoFood created urgency and excitement, while McDonald's established reputation ensured product satisfaction. This collaboration allowed cross-brand equity transfer, where McDonald's credibility strengthened GoFood's position among more traditional food buyers.

The campaign boosted short-term sales while reinforcing both brands' roles in the digital food delivery ecosystem in Indonesia. It deepened consumer loyalty by delivering a relevant and satisfying digital experience.

Conclusion

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that co-branding is a highly promising marketing strategy for building consumer trust, particularly in the food and beverage industry. By combining the strengths of two well-established brands, companies can create products or services that offer not only uniqueness but also significant added value in the eyes of consumers. This blend of brand identities produces a synergy that enhances positive perception and strengthens product credibility in the market. The co-branding strategy has proven effective in expanding market reach and increasing brand awareness. When two brands with distinct consumer segments collaborate, they effectively introduce their respective audiences to each other, thereby generating broader exposure and market penetration. Case examples such as Teh Botol Sosro x Re.juve and Gojek x McDonald's Indonesia demonstrate that co-branding is not limited to product innovation—it also creates strategic momentum in the form of marketing buzz, heightened consumer interest, and cultural relevance.

Furthermore, co-branding creates unique and memorable consumer experiences that foster deeper emotional connections with both brands. The perceived exclusivity and innovation generated through such collaborations are key drivers of consumer loyalty and repeat engagement. The combination of traditional familiarity (as seen in Teh Botol Sosro) with modern health trends (Re.juve), and accessibility (Gojek) with established global food service (McDonald's), illustrates the potential of co-branding to deliver cross-category value that resonates with contemporary consumer needs. When executed with strategic alignment and precise timing, co-branding is more than just a partnership—it is a powerful step toward enhancing brand competitiveness, expanding market presence, and maintaining relevance in an ever-evolving industry landscape.

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