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Crisis-Driven Rebranding and Narrative Strategy: The Transformation of Kutus Kutus into Sanga Sanga

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Abstract

Rebranding often becomes a strategic imperative, not merely an option, especially when a brand faces massive internal crises and market challenges. This qualitative study examines the rebranding strategy employed by Babe Bambang Pranoto, founder of PT Kutus-Kutus Herbal, in transforming the brand from "Kutus Kutus" to "Sanga Sanga". Through an in-depth analysis of autobiographical narratives, social media content, and public interviews, this research reveals how a defensive-progressive rebranding approach was implemented. The findings indicate that this strategy was constructed and communicated in social media as a means of restoring consumer trust, particularly through authentic storytelling and the strategic use of digital platforms, rather than through empirically measured consumer responses. The brand's repositioning into the premium segment, underpinned by locally resonant cultural symbolism articulated as a branding narrative, and integrate cultural symbolism in support of premium market repositioning. This study provides a valuable conceptual and analytical insights for understanding crisis-driven rebranding, especially for heritage brands navigating legitimacy, authenticity, and identity reconstruction in the digital era. These conclusions are derived from interpretive narrative and communication analysis rather than direct measurement of consumer attitudes or market performance.

KEYWORDS

rebranding; communication strategy; kutus kutus; sanga sanga.

Introduction

Indonesian culture has long recognized the application of herbal oils for muscle massage and therapy (Adelia & Setiyanto, 2024; Adrian, 2024). The soothing effect, accompanied by a warm sensation and unique aroma, induces comfort in consumers, therefore facilitating healing or easing their ailments (Beers, 2012). Numerous herbal oils are prevalent in Indonesian society, including eucalyptus oil, cajuput oil, *telon* oil, *Tawon* oil, *Angin* oil, and *Gandapura* oil, among others. These herbal oils are made from diverse medicinal plants and spices, with secret formulas that can be inherited through generations. The demographic of herbal oil users in Indonesia is highly varied, encompassing infants, children, and adults.

Kutus Kutus is an herbal oil product that was introduced in 2013, created by Sevarius Bambang Pranoto or currently known as Babe Bambang Pranoto, the visionary creator of PT Kutus-kutus Herbal in Gianyar, Bali (Mukti & I.B Haryanto, 2025; n. d., 2023). Kutus Kutus is marketed on its official website as a product that provides natural healing advantages derived from a combination of diverse herbal components, intended to improve health and well-being. This topical medicine provides pain relief, enhances stamina, and assists in the treatment of numerous ailments. Kutus Kutus oil, translating to "eight eight" in Balinese, is described as a cultural heritage of Indonesia that encapsulates indigenous wisdom. This number is linked by its owner to the significance of the number eight in Chinese philosophy as well, symbolizing infinite continuation and

representing virtue. However, in this context, the call of Indonesian cultural heritage and Chinese philosophy functions primarily as a symbolic branding and marketing narrative rather than as a reference to historically grounded or anthropological cultural preservation.

Kutus Kutus oil has achieved remarkable success since its inception, evidenced by its substantial sales. Pranoto then subsequently manufactured other goods, including herbal soap and skincare items such as body balm, facial wash, face mask, and facial moisturizer. Not only in product variations, Kutus Kutus has expanded into villa, hotel, radio, spa, and café sectors. Kutus Kutus achieved such success that in 2021, Pranoto leased a castle in the Netherlands, which served as the foreign office for Kutus Kutus (Ulya & Nadia, 2021).

Unfortunately, there are many challenges faced by the Kutus Kutus brand. Its products are widely counterfeited, especially in online stores, with the number reaching 80% (Redaksi, 2024). The parties responsible for this counterfeiting mostly come from its own partners, who market it at a lower price. However, it was later reported that this counterfeiting attempt did not cause Kutus Kutus to experience a decline in product sales, which were recorded to reach around 500 thousand packages each month. Another major issue that arose was an internal company crisis involving the owner's family, which developed into a formal legal dispute concerning the brand's patent and trademark right (Mukti & I.B Hariyanto, 2025). Following legal adjudication, Pranoto was formally prohibited from using the Kutus Kutus brand, marking a critical rupture in the brand's continuity.

However, as a successful brand, further steps need to be taken to maintain its reputation and uphold public trust in its products. Finally, on May 14, 2024, Kutus Kutus extensively transformed into Kutus Kutus Aksara Bali. This moment was also seized by Pranoto to launch a new premium brand: "Sanga Sanga Ultimate". The improvements made by Pranoto are not only limited to refining product formulations, designs, and logos, but also extend to management, finance, and marketing strategies.

At the same time, Pranoto and Kutus Kutus Aksara Bali are also strategizing narratively through various media content, both traditional media and social media, including launching an autobiography book entitled "Mari Bung Rebut Kembali" (Pranoto, 2024).

Based on that background, the study aims to examine Pranoto's rebranding strategy by analyzing how brand narratives and identities were reconstructed and communicated in response to crisis during the transition from Kutus Kutus Aksara Bali to the Sanga Sanga brand. How is brand legitimacy narratively reconstructed through founder-dominated communication during crisis-driven rebranding, in the absence of formal consumer or market validation?

A brand may require rebranding when its current identity no longer reflects the realities of the organization or the expectations of its stakeholders (Andirani & Anandita, 2019; Joseph et al., 2021; Meliawati et al., 2023; Rumijati et al., 2021). While external factors like market shifts, evolving consumer preferences, or increased competition are common drivers, internal crises can also serve as a powerful catalyst for rebranding (Indika & Dewi, 2018). Situations such as leadership scandals (Gilles et al., 2021), poor internal communication (Gehrau et al., 2024; Sesay, 2023), ethical breaches, or declining employee morale (Sesay, 2023) can severely damage a brand's reputation from within. In these cases, rebranding becomes not just a cosmetic change, but a strategic move to signal transformation, restore credibility, and rebuild trust—both internally among employees and externally among customers and partners (Bamfo et al., 2018; Hashem, 2023; Kannou & Rached, 2025).

By reshaping its visual identity, messaging, and core values, the brand communicates a commitment to change, transparency, and a new organizational culture. Rebranding after an internal crisis is often about more than just image—it's about redefining who the organization is and what it stands for moving forward; and that is an objective in this research.

Brand evolution

Brands don't remain static, as they must adapt to survive and thrive (Arundati, 2024; Keller, 2025; Sangroya et al., 2025). This transformation typically unfolds in six key stages, each representing a crucial phase in a brand's lifecycle, as follows:

1. **Brand Development.** Every brand begins with an idea—a promise to deliver something valuable to a specific group of people. In the brand development stage, this idea is translated into a distinct identity, encompassing a brand's purpose, vision, values, personality, and positioning in the market. This foundational phase is critical because it sets the tone for all future brand-related decisions and communications (Keller, 2013; Shams et al., 2024).
2. **Brand Introduction: Making a First Impression.** The brand introduction stage involves launching the brand to the market through campaigns that raise awareness, generate interest, and attract early adopters. Brands at this stage are often focused on creating strong brand associations and emotional appeal. Kotler and Keller stated that a well-executed brand introduction can create lasting impressions that shape long-term consumer relationships (Kotler & Keller, 2016).
3. **Brand Growth.** As a brand gains visibility, it enters the growth phase, where the focus shifts to scaling operations and deepening customer engagement (Keller, 2025). The goal is to increase market share, foster loyalty, and expand product offerings or market reach. Aaker emphasizes that brand growth is sustained by consistency in delivering the brand promise while adapting to consumer feedback (Aaker, 2004).
4. **Brand Repositioning.** Market dynamics, technological innovation, and evolving customer expectations often require brands to reposition themselves, that is to change the way they are perceived to stay relevant. This stage involves refining the brand's messaging, target audience, or value proposition, as happens in Kutus Kutus case. As Merrilees and Miller note, repositioning is not just about changing tactics but about rethinking how the brand fits into its cultural and competitive context (Miller et al., 2014).
5. **Brand Revitalization or Rebranding.** Involves a more radical shift in brand identity, which may include changing the brand name, logo, or narrative altogether. Muzellec and Lambkin describe corporate rebranding as a strategy that can either destroy, transfer, or create brand equity, depending on how well it's managed (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006; Stuart & Muzellec, 2004).
6. **Brand Legacy.** When a brand that evolves successfully through all previous stages may reach a level of brand leadership, it can become a cultural icon. These are brands that not only dominate the market but also establish emotional and symbolic meaning for consumers across generations. Holt refers to this stage as the result of "cultural branding," where well-known brands are not only perceived as just products but part of people's lifestyles and identities. At this point, the brand's role transcends utility—it becomes a legacy (Holt, 2014).

In this study, these stages are not treated as a linear or normative model, but as an analytical framework for interpreting the transformation of Kutus Kutus into Sanga Sanga. It is used to identify how different phases of brand development; particularly repositioning and rebranding,

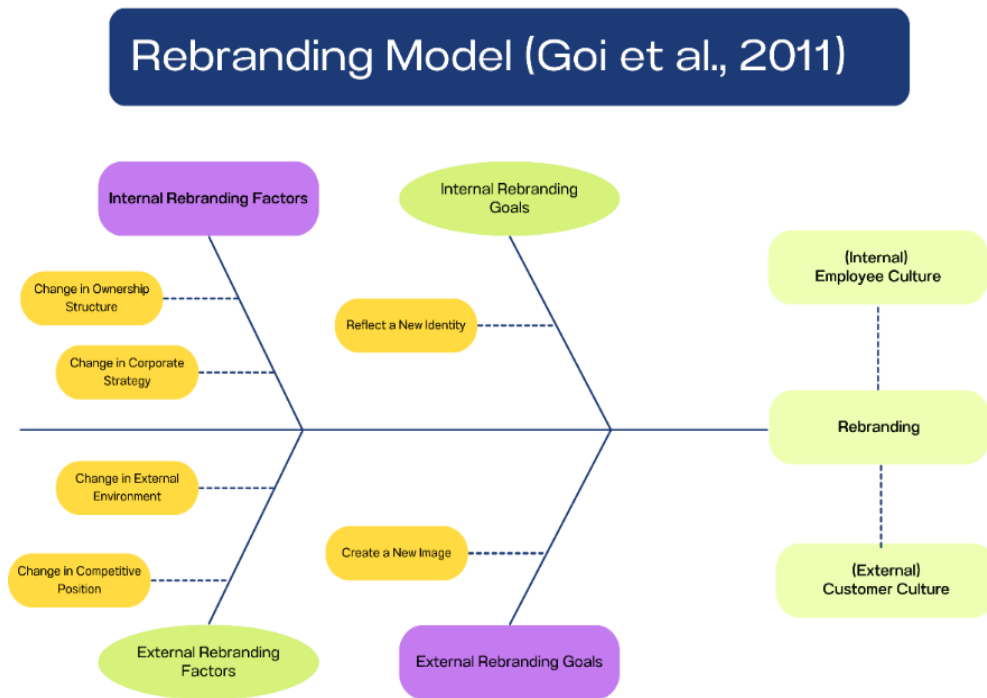


Figure 1. Rebranding Model (Goi & Goi, 2011)

occurred in response to crisis conditions. Accordingly, the brand evolution model serves as a conceptual lens through which the Kutus Kutus–Sanga Sanga transition is studied, enabling a structured interpretation of narrative changes, strategic objectives, and identity realignment during the rebranding process.

Rebranding for sustainable business

To understand the rebranding process, there are some highlights in concepts and theory. [Goi et al \(2011\)](#) explained that Daly and Moloney highlighted that rebranding entails altering some or all the tangible (the physical manifestation of the brand) and intangible (value, image, and emotions) components of a brand ([Goi & Goi, 2011](#)). In correlation with that, [Hankinson and Lomax \(2006\)](#) concurred that rebranding entails alterations not only in the organization's visual identity but also results in substantive changes within the organization itself. Rebranding entails altering one's image and constitutes a long-term objective ([Azhar, 2024](#); [Meliawati et al., 2023](#)). Other opinions, [Muzellec and Lambkin](#) defined rebranding as a modification of an organization's self-identity and/or an endeavor to alter external stakeholders' impressions of its image ([Goi & Goi, 2011](#); [Ramos et al., 2024](#)). The process of rebranding is shown in the following [figure 1](#).

A lot of research has been written about rebranding strategies in the fields of marketing and public relations. Most of it has focused on outside factors like changes in the market, changing buyer tastes, and competition. Research from the past shows that stories, emotional appeal, and digital communication can all help with rebranding ([Keller, 2013](#); [Kotler & Keller, 2016](#)). Besides that, research has looked at how internal disasters like leadership scandals or ethical breaches affect rebranding ([Goi & Goi, 2011](#); [Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006](#)). But these studies tend to look at rebranding processes in a broad way across industries, paying little attention to brands with deep cultural roots, like traditional herbal goods in Indonesia.

[Aaker \(2004\)](#) also talks about the steps of brand evolution, from development to leadership. However, there isn't a lot of research that looks at how traditional heritage sense and modern branding strategies interact during

rebranding. Some news [Redaksi \(2024\)](#) talks about problems with counterfeit goods, but not many look at how rebranding can help solve these problems while still protecting national identity.

Although prior studies have established that rebranding may be triggered by crisis, market shifts, or reputational threats, they diverge in how they conceptualize the mechanism of recovery. Marketing-oriented research tends to emphasize brand equity restoration and consumer response, while communication-oriented studies highlight symbolism, storytelling, and identity negotiation are quite limited. However, few studies explicitly showed the tension between institutional branding structures and founder-centered narrative authority, particularly in contexts where legal disputes and counterfeiting undermine formal brand ownership. This unresolved tension provides the analytical entry point for the present study.

This study contributes theoretically by conceptualizing crisis-driven rebranding as a narrative and identity reconstruction process; contextually by examining rebranding within Indonesia's herbal traditional wellness sector under conditions of legal and market disruption; and methodologically by demonstrating the analytical value of documentary and netnographic data for studying branding communication. The results will add to both academic literature and the practical strategies for traditional brands that are having similar problems.

Methods

This research is exploratory in nature as defined by [Stebbins \(2001\)](#), emphasizing inductive analysis and conceptual clarification in contexts where phenomena are insufficiently theorized, rather than hypothesis testing or outcome measurement. This study aims to understand how rebranding strategy is implemented in Sanga Sanga brand. A qualitative approach is used to gain a deeper understanding of the rebranding process of Kutus Kutus to Sanga Sanga amid family crises.

This study relies on secondary data obtained from publicly accessible sources rather than primary interviews conducted

by the researcher. The data consists of three main types, namely recorded interviews published on YouTube, in which the research subject, Pranoto, was interviewed by his official team (@SangaSangaTV) and by third parties (@RhenaldKasali, @kasisolusi, @VoKSRadioJogja, @TomMClfle, @baliposttv, @swamediainc). These recordings are treated not as neutral or transparent accounts of events but as self-representational narrative constructions produced by the subject within a public and mediatized context. These are authentic verbal data that represent the subject's narratives in a public setting, social media content produced and disseminated by the subject, in Instagram and TikTok (@servasiuspranoto, @kutuskutusofficial). Such content is considered important as a self-representational medium that provides insight into the subject's identity construction and communication strategies. Moreover the autobiographical writings, particularly the subject's published autobiography, are treated as a personal narrative and documentary source reflecting the subject's self-representation and lived experiences.

The study employs a documentary research approach, drawing on the systematic collection and interpretation of secondary sources. Documentary analysis is widely recognized as a valid qualitative method for examining textual and audiovisual data, as it allows researchers to extract meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge from existing materials (Bowen, 2009; Dalglish et al., 2021). In addition, the use of social media content follows the principles of netnography, which adapts ethnographic techniques to online environments and emphasizes the analysis of naturally occurring digital interactions (Kozinets, 2020). All data was gathered from publicly available platforms and publications to ensure accessibility and transparency, starting from December 2023 which the rebranding phase started up to February 2025.

To ensure analytical transparency, the study operationalized netnography using the interactive data analysis model of Miles and Huberman (2019), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The primary unit of analysis was the discursive segment, defined as coherent narrative statements appearing in: (1) interview responses, (2) Instagram/TikTok captions and visual-text combinations, (3) autobiographical paragraphs, and (4) comment-response exchanges where interaction occurred. The focus was on meaning-bearing narrative constructions related to crisis framing, legitimacy claims, authenticity signaling, and premium repositioning.

In the data condensation process, all data were transcribed and repeatedly reviewed. Open coding was first conducted inductively to identify recurring expressions, then clustered into higher-order thematic categories, including: defensive legitimacy (counterfeit contrast, authenticity emphasis), founder-centered authority (personal struggle, moral positioning), symbolic rebirth framing (naming change, "birth" announcements), and progressive premium repositioning (quality elevation, lifestyle discourse). Then thematic matrices were constructed to compare how these categories appeared across platforms (official interviews, third-party interviews, social media, autobiography). This allowed identification of recurring communicative sequences, such as:

crisis acknowledgment → moral framing → innovation claim → premium reframing.

For conclusion drawing and verification, interpretive conclusions were continuously verified through cross-source triangulation, examining consistency, reinforcement, or escalation of themes across media contexts. Rather than measuring engagement quantitatively, the netnographic component analyzed qualitative interaction patterns,

including founder responses to followers and repeated authenticity signaling in digital communication.

All data were treated as strategic self-representations. Therefore, the analysis focused on how legitimacy and brand identity were narratively constructed and stabilized, rather than on validating empirical market impact.

The combination of these data sources also enables source triangulation, in which narratives from interviews, social media, and autobiographical writings are compared to identify consistencies, contradictions, and emerging themes. This strengthens the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings despite the absence of primary data collection.

Result and Discussion

In handling this case, it is clear that the main control rests with Pranoto, the founder and creator of the Kutus Kutus product. Pranoto appears across all communication media, both digitally through social media, video channels, and news portals. Furthermore, with the publication of his autobiographical book, "Mari Bung Rebut Kembali" ("Come on, Let's Get it Back") (Pranoto, 2024), emphasizing "Bali" with bold colour as the location of this company and the owner's residence. This creative idea suggests an attempt to take control of the publicity and publications.

This title also has profound meaning, as it is inspired by the lyrics of a national song, "Halo Halo Bandung." This song is steeped in the voice of struggle and nationalism. Pranoto equates the crisis facing his company and himself with the struggles of patriots during wartime. In correlation to this study, this analogy is analyzed as a form of symbolic storytelling and identity framing, through which the founder positions himself as a moral protagonist confronting injustice, resilience, and struggle. The wartime metaphor is interpreted as a narrative device that mobilizes nationalist symbolism to legitimize the rebranding process and to reframe the crisis in ethical and emotional terms.

In all the news reports and videos appearing on social media, Pranoto is giving a strong opinion, emphasizing how this crisis has affected him personally and professionally. From the broadcast, Pranoto, who initially used a diplomatic narrative, gradually became clearer in stating that this crisis was not solely due to product counterfeiting, but rather that there were major problems within the family.

Brand evolution of Sanga Sanga

The transformation of Kutus Kutus into Sanga Sanga illustrates a deliberate brand evolution that integrates both defensive and progressive rebranding strategies. As noted by Merrilees and Miller, defensive rebranding is typically driven by the need to protect brand equity from external threats—such as counterfeiting—while progressive rebranding seeks to reposition the brand toward new markets and aspirational identities (Merrilees & Miller, 2008). In the case of Sanga Sanga, the rebranding is largely defensive in origin, aimed at differentiating itself from counterfeit Kutus Kutus products that threatened consumer trust. However, it also carries progressive aspirations by elevating the brand into a premium wellness identity, making it more competitive in both domestic and international markets.

According to Keller (2013) and Kladou (2017), brand elements—such as name, logo, and design—are fundamental tools to signal differentiation and enhance memorability. In this evolution, the name Sanga Sanga embodies a symbolic depth associated with the spiritual significance of the number nine in Javanese culture. This change represents more than a cosmetic adjustment; it injects cultural authenticity and philosophical meaning into the brand. The redesigned packaging and visual cues further align with Kapferer's concept

of building a coherent brand identity system that communicates premium positioning (Kapferer, 2012).

Meanwhile, Aaker emphasizes the role of positioning in creating a brand's unique space in the consumer's mind (Aaker, 2004). While Kutus Kutus was often associated with traditional jamu-based herbal oil, Sanga Sanga is positioned as a premium herbal wellness brand. This repositioning reflects Keller's view of positioning as not only functional but also symbolic and appealing to consumers' aspirations for authenticity, exclusivity, and well-being (Keller, 2013). By doing so, the brand shifts its image away from being merely medicinal toward becoming part of a lifestyle and holistic wellness movement.

Rebranding requires coherent communication strategies, as highlighted by Muzellec and Lambkin (2006). Sanga Sanga has adopted a hybrid marketing approach that combines offline community engagement—through roadshows, distributor training, gatherings, as well as PR campaigns and media relations—with online storytelling that leverages social media to educate consumers about the transition. This dual strategy not only reassures loyal customers but also expands reach to new audiences. In line with Kapferer's (2012) "brand prism," these strategies ensure both internal alignment with distributors and external legitimacy with consumers.

Furthermore, brand performance reflects how effectively the new brand resonates with stakeholders. Keller and Lehmann emphasize that brand performance can be measured in terms of consumer response, loyalty, and distributor confidence (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). Early indications drawn from communication intensity and narrative consistency in social media suggest that Sanga Sanga has successfully reassured customers about product authenticity, while also generating curiosity and engagement in digital platforms. The rebranding thus functions as a corrective measure (defensive) while simultaneously reenergizing market attention (progressive).

Moving on, the top goal of rebranding is to strengthen or safeguard brand equity. As Aaker defines it, brand equity is the set of assets and liabilities linked to a brand's name and symbol. By repositioning itself as Sanga Sanga, the brand mitigates the liabilities associated with counterfeit Kutus Kutus products and reestablishes authenticity as a key brand asset. The symbolic and cultural resonance of the name enhances consumer loyalty and creates a form of emotional equity, aligning with Keller's notion of brand resonance that deepens consumer-brand relationships.

The Rebranding Model of Sanga Sanga

The rebranding of Kutus Kutus into Sanga Sanga represents a complex strategic response to both internal and external pressures, which materialized through two analytically distinct yet interrelated logics: defensive rebranding, that aimed at legitimacy protection, and progressive rebranding which oriented towards market repositioning. As Muzellec and Lambkin (2006) and Meliawati et al (2023) note, rebranding is often driven by the need to realign brand identity with evolving corporate strategies, market challenges, or cultural contexts. In this case, the transformation is not limited to a superficial change of name but signifies a deeper repositioning in corporate strategy, market orientation, and cultural alignment. Based on the autobiography, the narration of transformation was mentioned by Pranoto, which stated "... I've tried various methods to stop the counterfeiting process immediately. I continue to innovate... with a logo change that signifies that Kutus Kutus is ready to provide more, broader, and greater benefits" (Pranoto, 2024). This statement was also seen by his Instagram post on January 3, 2024, which showed the "original and genuine product" through the new packaging of Kutus Kutus. He also mentioned that it is a strategy to counter

the counterfeit products that were sold online. Later, the narration of Innovation and Transformation from Kutus Kutus Aksara Bali to Sanga Sanga was described exclusively in chapter 7 of the book and visually appeared in Instagram on December 28, 2023, with a caption "The Sanga Sanga was born 9122023".

By looking at defensive rebranding perspective, internal pressures—particularly trademark disputes, ownership conflicts, and the loss of brand control due to counterfeiting—constituted the primary trigger for the transformation from Kutus Kutus to Sanga Sanga. The internal rebranding factors played a central role in shaping the decision. First, there was a deliberate corporate strategy shift: while Kutus Kutus was strongly associated with a traditional jamu and herbal-based image, Sanga Sanga was repositioned as a premium wellness and lifestyle brand, integrating cultural heritage with modern branding principles. As Kapferer (2012) emphasizes, a successful brand identity must remain coherent while adapting to new strategic directions. Second, legal disputes and ownership conflicts over intellectual property rights (HAKI) accelerated the urgency of rebranding. These challenges underscored the need for a distinct identity that could stand independently from controversies surrounding the original brand.

Furthermore, from a progressive rebranding perspective, external pressures prompted the brand to move beyond damage control toward strategic repositioning, particularly through premiumization or making a more superior quality product, and lifestyle-oriented branding.

At the same time, external rebranding factors intensified the pressure for transformation. The proliferation of counterfeit Kutus Kutus products significantly eroded consumer trust and diluted the original brand equity. In addition, the competitive landscape of Indonesia's herbal wellness market created the necessity for stronger differentiation. Keller (2013) argues that external threats such as imitation and brand clutter can weaken brand resonance, making proactive rebranding necessary to restore legitimacy and distinctiveness.

The rebranding process was thus guided by both internal and external goals. Internally, the brand sought to reflect a new identity. The adoption of the name Sanga Sanga conveyed deeper cultural and spiritual symbolism, distinguishing the product from being perceived as merely an herbal oil. This aligns with Aaker's (2004) notion that strong brands rely on symbolic and emotional meaning to reinforce identity and consumer attachment. Externally, the rebranding aimed to create a new image that was modern, premium, authentic, and halal certified. This external repositioning provided not only a clear point of differentiation but also served as a defensive measure to distance the brand from counterfeit products and to regain market credibility.

At its core, the rebranding represents a strategic transformation from Kutus Kutus to Sanga Sanga. It is not merely cosmetics but rather a comprehensive repositioning effort, integrating symbolic cultural capital with market-driven strategies. This repositioning reflects the dual nature of rebranding identified by Merrilees and Miller (2008), combining both defensive motivations (to safeguard authenticity and market trust) and progressive aspirations (to elevate the brand into a lifestyle-driven, premium wellness space).

For such a transformation to succeed, it required alignment of both internal and external cultures. On the internal side, distributors, agents, and staff were systematically educated and aligned with the new brand narrative through roadshows, training programs, and direct engagement sessions. These efforts ensured that employees and distribution partners did not merely adopt the new identity but also became ambassadors of the brand's transformation. Externally, the company invested in customer education campaigns that emphasized continuity in product quality while highlighting the

enhanced values embodied by Sanga Sanga. Through social media campaigns and cultural events, consumers were encouraged to perceive Sanga Sanga not as a discontinuity from Kutus Kutus, but as its legitimate and elevated successor, thereby rebuilding trust and fostering long-term engagement.

In sum, the rebranding of Sanga Sanga reflects an integrated approach where internal restructuring, external differentiation, cultural symbolism, and strategic communication converge to produce a brand that is both safeguarded from past challenges and positioned for future growth. This reflects Kapferer's (2012) argument that successful rebranding must balance continuity and change, ensuring that the heritage sense is not lost while new equity is strategically built. Taken together, the defensive and progressive components did not operate sequentially but coexisted as parallel strategic logics, allowing the brand to simultaneously stabilize legitimacy under crisis while projecting a renewed and aspirational market identity.

The rebranding of Kutus Kutus into Sanga Sanga illustrates the dynamics of crisis-driven rebranding, where organizational identity must be reshaped to respond to urgent threats. As Muzellec and Lambkin (2006) argue, rebranding is often a strategic necessity when existing brand equity becomes compromised. In this case, two converging crises—an internal trademark dispute and the proliferation of counterfeit products saturating up to 80% of the market—undermined both consumer trust and corporate legitimacy. The resulting transformation underscores Merrilees and Miller's (2008) typology of rebranding, reflecting a predominantly defensive approach aimed at damage control, while also incorporating progressive elements that repositioned the brand within a more premium lifestyle domain.

Central to this transformation was the role of narrative-based trust recovery. Storytelling became not only a branding tactic but also a strategy of symbolic repair. By employing autobiographical content, social media postings, and interviews, the founder created what Holt (2014) describes as a cultural narrative that situates the brand within a larger story of resilience, authenticity, and renewal. Similar narrative strategies have been observed in other founder-led rebranding contexts, where personal storytelling, autobiographical framing, and founder visibility function as mechanisms for restoring brand legitimacy and emotional resonance during periods of crisis (e.g., Rode & Vallaster (2005) and Holt (2014)). The Sanga Sanga case thus reflects a broader pattern in which founders act as narrative anchors in moments of organizational disruption, rather than representing an isolated or idiosyncratic instance.

This emphasis on narrative resonates with Kapferer's (2012) view that strong brands are built through meaning systems, where symbolic associations reinforce consumer trust. The personal narrative of overcoming adversity thus functioned as a counterbalance to the erosion of trust caused by counterfeiting and legal uncertainty.

The rebranding process also illustrates the significance of founder-led strategy in shaping brand identity. While Aaker (2004) highlights the importance of organizational resources and identity systems, in practice the evolution of Sanga Sanga was largely driven by a single figure: Bambang Pranoto. His personal credibility, public visibility, and direct involvement in product formulation and packaging positioned him as the living embodiment of the brand. This aligns with literature on entrepreneurial branding (Rode & Vallaster, 2005), which highlights the capacity of founders to act as brand custodians, ensuring authenticity and coherence during times of transition. The founder's centrality also suggests both opportunities—through trust and consistency—and vulnerabilities, as overreliance on individual leadership may

limit the institutionalization of brand identity. While this founder-centric configuration enhanced narrative coherence and trust during the crisis, it also involves structural risks, including over-personalization of brand identity, limited institutionalization, and potential vulnerability if leadership legitimacy be contested or transferred. This tension highlights the conflicting role of founder dominance in rebranding efforts triggered by crisis.

The strategic use of digital platforms highlights another dimension of the rebranding. Social media and online channels have become critical tools for both narrative dissemination and counterfeit control through symbolic differentiation and authenticity signaling, rather than through technical enforcement mechanisms. In this study, digital strategy is examined at the level of communicative function and narrative control, rather than through quantitative indicators such as reach, engagement, or sentiment metrics. Digital branding scholarship has shown that social media platforms enable brands to manage meaning through interaction, visibility, and narrative circulation (Gensler et al., 2013; Keller, 2013), even when audience response is not formally measured. As Keller (2013) notes, brand communication in digital spaces is integral to reinforcing resonance and loyalty. By directly engaging loyal customers, clarifying misconceptions, and countering disinformation, Sanga Sanga demonstrates how digital platforms can serve as both defensive mechanisms and community-building tools. This strategy reflects emerging scholarship on digital branding (Gensler et al., 2013), where online environments provide brands with unprecedented control over their narrative, while simultaneously demanding authenticity and constant engagement.

Finally, the legal resolution of the trademark dispute in April 2025 provided formal legitimacy to the rebranding process (Avisena, 2025). The Surabaya Commercial Court's ruling, which declared Bambang Pranoto the rightful owner of the Kutus Kutus trademark, reinforced his symbolic and legal authority. This moment was pivotal not only for protecting intellectual property but also for consolidating consumer trust in Sanga Sanga. From the perspective of Aaker's (2004) model of brand equity, legal validation represents a crucial step in transforming symbolic trust into institutional legitimacy, thereby stabilizing the brand's future trajectory.

Based on the video interview in @SangaSangaTV and @RhenaldKasali YouTube channel, although Pranoto incorporates Balinese elements and traditional herbal ingredients, he did not explicitly frame the brand as a tool to preserve cultural tradition. He moved to Bali with the intention of becoming a spiritual individual, engaging in prayers and meditation. This statement is also mentioned in his book. The discovery of the oil that would become Kutus Kutus occurred during his personal journey to heal himself from paralysis after conventional treatments failed. He described this as a personal discovery rather than a direct revival or application of a specific traditional formula. In relevance to this, the naming of the product was more on commercialization rather than the inherent concept, as the formulation of the oil itself being rooted in tradition.

Moreover, Pranoto mentioned in the video and the book that the product's concept, formulation, or ingredients were derived from established traditional or cultural practices. He "found" the oil and then successfully using it for personal recovery before sharing and commercializing it. Though, in his autobiography, he stated clearly in one particular page that "for the longest time, Indonesian herbs have a great power to shake the world". Then in chapter 6 of the book, he specifically dedicated his narrative to explaining spice and herbs as the biggest potential for Kutus Kutus market. Cultural aspects—like the use of Balinese numbers or sacred herbs—are part of his personal journey, product development, and branding narrative creativity, not positioned specifically as the main cultural

preservation effort. In conclusion, it is understandable that the focus of the crisis handling remains on product efficacy, authenticity, and brand protection, rather than cultural heritage as a central mission.

The rebranding of Kutus Kutus into Sanga Sanga provides strong empirical support for earlier studies that positioned rebranding as a strategic response to organizational crises. Indika and Dewi (2018) emphasized that internal challenges such as communication breakdowns or leadership conflicts can necessitate brand transformation. The trademark dispute and family conflict surrounding Kutus Kutus illustrate precisely this condition, where rebranding became not a voluntary choice but a necessary intervention to safeguard legitimacy and continuity. This also aligns with Hashem's (2023) findings in the cosmetic sector, which suggest that rebranding under crisis conditions functions as a means to restore credibility and strengthen brand value.

At the same time, the case of Sanga Sanga echoes the argument of Andirani and Anandita (2019) and Rumijati et al. (2021), who highlight rebranding as a tool to refresh stakeholder perceptions and enhance product value. Through the repositioning of Kutus Kutus into a premium wellness identity, Sanga Sanga demonstrates how crisis-driven rebranding can move beyond damage control and evolve into a strategy for value creation. By integrating cultural symbolism, premium packaging, and lifestyle positioning, the brand reinforced trust while capturing new markets—consistent with earlier studies that emphasize rebranding as a mechanism for both reputation repair and competitive differentiation.

Moreover, previous research often framed rebranding around external triggers such as market shifts, consumer preferences, or competition (Goi & Goi, 2011; Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006). The Sanga Sanga case contributes nuance by showing how internal crises (family disputes, intellectual property conflicts) and external threats (counterfeiting) can intersect to create a “perfect storm” that accelerates the rebranding process. In this sense, the findings complement Muzellec and Lambkin's (2006) perspective that rebranding can simultaneously destroy and create brand equity, as Kutus Kutus had to shed associations with counterfeit products while building fresh equity through the Sanga Sanga identity.

In sum, the findings confirm and extend previous research by showing that while rebranding is often studied in broad corporate or market-driven contexts, it is equally relevant in culturally embedded industries such as traditional herbal wellness. The case illustrates how the theories advanced by earlier scholars—rebranding for stakeholder trust (Rumijati et al., 2021), crisis-driven transformation (Hashem, 2023; Indika & Dewi, 2018), and equity reconstruction (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006)—manifest concretely in an Indonesian heritage brand navigating both cultural and commercial challenges.

Conclusion

The rebranding of Kutus Kutus into Sanga Sanga illustrates that internal crises—ranging from trademark disputes, family problems, to the widespread circulation of counterfeit products—can serve not only as threats but also as catalysts for brand renewal. Rather than being institutionally orchestrated, the transformation was driven by the founder's personal authority, narrative, and visibility. This underscores the crucial role of entrepreneurial leadership in rebranding processes, where authenticity, storytelling, and direct engagement with stakeholders are deployed as instruments of trust recovery. While such founder-led rebranding can accelerate trust recovery during periods of crisis, it also raises questions regarding scalability and

institutional memory, as brand identity becomes closely tied to individual authority rather than routinized organizational practices.

In contrast to non-founder-led heritage rebranding efforts—where identity reconstruction is typically institutionalized through formal governance, professional brand management, and standardized communication systems—founder-centric models rely more heavily on personal credibility and narrative continuity, which may complicate long-term institutionalization once crisis conditions subside.

Theoretically, this study does not seek to introduce new rebranding typologies or predictive models. Instead, as the Sanga Sanga case reveals, it clarifies and repositions existing rebranding concepts by demonstrating how defensive and progressive logics may operate simultaneously as narrative strategies of legitimacy repair, rather than as sequential or outcome-driven phases. By foregrounding founder-led narrative authority and symbolic communication, the study contributes to rebranding theory at the level of conceptual interpretation, particularly in crisis communication contexts where institutional branding structures are weakened.

Practically, the implications of this study are analytical rather than prescriptive. The findings do not suggest universally applicable rebranding formulas, but showing how, in crisis conditions marked by legal uncertainty and counterfeit products growing significantly, narrative coherence, symbolic framing, and founder visibility may function as short-to medium-term mechanisms for stabilizing stakeholder trust. These insights are most relevant for founder-driven or commercial brands operating in contexts where institutional branding capacity is constrained.

Research Limitation

The findings of this study should be interpreted within the context of its methodological positioning. Because the analysis is based on self-representational narratives, publicly mediated interviews, and founder-produced content, the study captures how rebranding is discursively constructed and justified, rather than how it is contested, negotiated, or received by other stakeholders.

Only secondary data, including social media posts, recorded interviews, and autobiographical narratives, were used in this study. These sources have inherent limitations even though they are rich and suitable for comprehending the founder's communication tactics. The founder himself created or mediated a large portion of the content, which increases the risk of selective representation or narrative bias. The lack of primary, interactive interviews made it more difficult to delve deeper into disputed viewpoints, especially those of other stakeholders like competitors, distributors, or customers.

However, triangulation was made possible, and the findings' credibility was reinforced by the utilization of various document types, including digital, audiovisual, and textual ones. To better understand how rebranding narratives are embraced, understood, and maintained over time by larger audiences, future research might benefit from fusing this type of documentary analysis with ethnographic or other methodologies.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research could extend these insights by comparing similar cases in culturally embedded industries, exploring how different founders or organizations institutionalize rebranding beyond individual leadership, or tracing the long-term sustainability of crisis-driven transformations.

Author contributions

Conceptualization, LR; methodology, LR, DM.; validation,

LR, CD, EBFF.; formal analysis, LR, CD.; investigation, LR, DM; resources, LR, DM.; data curation, CD, EBFF.; writing—original draft preparation, LR; writing—review and editing, L.R., DM; supervision, LR; project administration, CD. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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