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The Impact of Sponsorship and Customer Engagement on Brand Awareness: The Mediating Role of Brand Image

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Abstract

Intensifying competition in the food and beverage industry has heightened the strategic relevance of sponsorship activities and customer engagement in shaping consumer-based brand outcomes. This study examines the statistical associations between sponsorship programs, customer engagement, and brand awareness, with brand image positioned as an intervening construct, within the specific context of PT Wingsfood's Mie Sedaap product sampling program in Mampang. Employing a quantitative research design, the study utilized purposive sampling to collect data from N = 280 respondents who had participated in the sampling program. Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with a bootstrapping procedure to assess the significance of the hypothesized relationships. The findings reveal that sponsorship and customer engagement are statistically associated with brand awareness, both directly and indirectly through brand image as a mediating variable. These results underscore the importance of integrating experiential marketing initiatives with interactive consumer engagement strategies to strengthen brand positioning in highly competitive markets.

KEYWORDS

brand awareness, brand image, customer engagement, sponsorship program.

Introduction

Competition in Indonesia's food and beverage industry continues to intensify as companies gain wider access to diverse market segments and face increasingly dynamic consumer preferences (Valantia & Hidayat, 2024). Economic globalization has further accelerated this trend by enabling free trade and intensifying competition across various sectors (Oktavianti & Hasrina, 2020). Each company is therefore required to develop unique and adaptive marketing approaches to maintain competitiveness and secure market share in a rapidly evolving business environment (Budiman et al., 2021). At the same time, the fast development of digital technology has strengthened competitive pressures among both large corporations and small businesses, making strategic innovation an essential component for business sustainability (Derajat & Suwitho, 2021; Nurrachmi et al., 2024).

Data from Kompas.co.id indicate that tracked sales within its monitored FMCG product categories and retail channels grew by approximately 3% in 2024, reaching around IDR 59 trillion. It is important to note that these figures reflect aggregated transaction data captured within the platform's coverage scope, rather than representing the entirety of the national FMCG market. This measured growth nonetheless signals increasing competitive intensity within the observed segments, where product proliferation and brand parity constrain differentiation based solely on functional attributes. Under such conditions, sponsorship programs and customer engagement initiatives become strategically salient as relational marketing instruments that strengthen brand image and enhance brand awareness by fostering experiential and emotional connections with consumers. Accordingly, the documented expansion within

the observed FMCG segments reinforces the analytical relevance of examining how sponsorship and customer engagement operate as relational mechanisms that mediate competitive pressures and contribute to the development of sustainable brand equity. PT Wingsfood, as one of the major players in the instant noodle industry, faces similar competitive pressures, particularly in enhancing brand awareness and brand image amid intense rivalry especially against dominant market leaders such as Indomie.

In response to these challenges, companies increasingly adopt marketing communication strategies such as sponsorship programs and customer engagement initiatives, which are widely discussed within contemporary branding literature as core mechanisms of strengthening brand equity through experiential interaction and relational value creation (Anam, 2024; Augusta et al., 2023). Sponsorship, particularly through product sampling, has been widely adopted as a marketing communication strategy to introduce products directly to consumers and to *potentially* foster positive brand associations; however, its effectiveness is contingent upon contextual factors such as audience involvement, message brand congruence, and the quality of consumer engagement generated during the sponsorship activity (Derajat & Suwito, 2021). PT Wingsfood utilizes this strategy by distributing Mie Sedaap product samples to schools and local communities, aiming to engage potential consumers and enhance brand familiarity (Valantia & Hidayat, 2024). The rise in the number of schools reported by the Indonesian Central Statistics Agency (BPS) reinforces the strategic potential of such programs, as educational institutions represent a large and accessible consumer base (Consulting, 2024).

Customer engagement has been conceptually recognized in contemporary branding literature as a critical dimension in shaping consumer-brand relationships, particularly in facilitating interactive, co-creative, and value-driven exchanges between firms and consumers. On digital platforms like Instagram, engagement is reflected through likes, comments, and shares, which serve as indicators of consumer responsiveness and interest (Ningsih, 2022). Active engagement not only enhances consumer-brand interaction but also contributes to long-term loyalty, retention, and valuable feedback for product improvement. However, despite various initiatives undertaken by PT Wingsfood, Anecdotal consumer opinions expressed on public discussion platforms such as Quora suggest the persistence of perceptions that favor competing brands, particularly Indomie, in terms of taste familiarity and emotional attachment. While these observations do not constitute empirical evidence, they provide contextual insights into prevailing consumer narratives that may shape brand image and awareness, thereby underscoring the relevance of systematically examining how structured sponsorship and engagement strategies can influence consumer perceptions within the FMCG market.

These perceptions are further reflected in the 2024 Top Brand Index, where Indomie dominates the instant noodle segment with 73%, while Mie Sedaap trails significantly at 11.6% (Top Brand Award, 2024). The wide gap suggests that despite ongoing sponsorship and promotional activities, Mie Sedaap has yet to achieve comparable levels of brand awareness and brand image. This discrepancy raises questions regarding the effectiveness of existing sponsorship strategies and the mediating role of brand image in driving consumer awareness and preference.

Existing literature highlights that sponsorship can influence brand-related outcomes; however, its effectiveness is contingent upon factors such as strategic fit, perceived relevance, and the integration of supporting marketing activities. Empirical findings in prior studies indicate that sponsorship does not uniformly translate into stronger brand

awareness, particularly when congruence between the sponsored entity and the brand is weak or when activation strategies are insufficient. Accordingly, it is essential to ensure that cited evidence specifically addresses sponsorship effectiveness to maintain conceptual and empirical validity within the literature review (Pancić et al., 2023), while others reveal that inadequate supporting communication may even weaken brand attitudes (Eisend et al., 2020). Additionally, prior studies have rarely examined sponsorship-based product sampling in conjunction with customer engagement as an integrated marketing mechanism within the FMCG sector, particularly in emerging markets such as Indonesia (Gong et al., 2020). While international studies have explored sponsorship or engagement separately often within Western market settings they tend to overlook the mediating role of brand image in explaining how these strategies translate into brand awareness outcomes. By positioning brand image as an intervening construct, this study extends existing *experiential marketing* and *brand equity* frameworks by offering a more nuanced explanation of the relational pathways through which sponsorship and engagement influence consumer-based brand awareness in competitive FMCG environments.

Given these empirical and theoretical gaps, the present study aims to analyze the influence of sponsorship programs and customer engagement on brand awareness, with brand image serving as an intervening variable. Focusing on PT Wingsfood's Mie Sedaap product sampling initiatives, this research seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies in strengthening consumer perceptions, enhancing brand competitiveness, and addressing persistent disparities within the instant noodle market.

Methods

This study employed a quantitative research design to examine the structural relationships among sponsorship, customer engagement, brand image, and brand awareness within the context of the Mie Sedaap brand. A survey-based approach was adopted to capture consumers' perceptions and evaluative responses toward marketing activities experienced through product sampling and brand-related interactions. All constructs were operationalized using measurement scales adapted from established empirical studies in branding and relationship marketing literature. Specifically, sponsorship was measured using items derived from sponsorship effectiveness and brand-fit scales, customer engagement from multidimensional engagement scales (cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions), brand image from associative brand perception scales, and brand awareness from recognition and recall-based measures. Each construct was measured using 4–6 reflective indicators, consistent with prior operationalizations.

The adaptation process involved translation and back-translation procedures to ensure semantic equivalence between the original English instruments and the Indonesian context. A pilot test was conducted with a small group of respondents ($n \approx 30$) to assess item clarity, contextual relevance, and preliminary reliability. Feedback from the pilot phase informed minor wording adjustments without altering the conceptual meaning of the items. All measurement items were assessed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," enabling perceptual data to be systematically quantified for multivariate analysis. The measurement model was specified as reflective, given that the indicators were assumed to represent manifestations of the underlying latent constructs.

The target population comprised residents of Mampang, South Jakarta, aged 17 years and above, who were familiar with Mie Sedaap and had prior exposure to the brand. A purposive sampling technique was applied with clearly defined screening

criteria, including: (1) respondents who had received or directly participated in a Mie Sedaap product sampling program within the past 6–12 months, (2) respondents who were able to recognize or recall the sampling campaign or related promotional activities, and/or (3) respondents who had been exposed to Mie Sedaap marketing content through digital platforms such as social media advertisements. Data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed via social media channels and community networks, with safeguards implemented to ensure data quality, including duplicate-response controls (e.g., single-response restriction per device/email and response screening for consistency). While this approach enhances internal relevance and construct sensitivity, it also entails limitations related to external validity, as the findings may not be fully generalizable beyond consumers with similar demographic and experiential characteristics.

The determination of sample size was based on model-based considerations consistent with PLS-SEM methodological guidance. Referring to recommendations by Hair et al., the minimum sample size should exceed the “10-times rule,” defined as ten times the maximum number of structural paths directed at a latent construct in the model. Given that the most complex construct in the proposed model receives multiple incoming paths, the minimum threshold was substantially lower than the final sample. Furthermore, a statistical power analysis rationale was considered, where a sample size of $N = 280$ is sufficient to detect medium effect sizes ($f^2 \approx 0.15$) at a statistical power level of 0.80 and a significance level of 0.05 in structural equation modeling contexts. This sample size therefore meets both heuristic and power-based criteria, ensuring stable parameter estimation and robust hypothesis testing within the PLS-SEM framework.

Primary data were collected through an online questionnaire administered via Google Forms, enabling efficient access to respondents and standardized data collection procedures. The questionnaire consisted of close-ended items to minimize response ambiguity and facilitate statistical analysis. To mitigate the risk of common method variance arising from the use of a single data source, several procedural remedies were applied, including ensuring respondent anonymity, clarifying that there were no right or wrong answers, and varying item wording to reduce evaluation apprehension and pattern responses. Secondary data from academic journals, books, and relevant institutional reports were also utilized to support the theoretical framework and methodological decisions.

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize respondent profiles and provide an initial overview of perceptions across study variables. Inferential analysis was performed using PLS-SEM with SmartPLS 4.0 software, which is suitable for complex models and does not require strict normality assumptions. The analytical procedure involved a two-stage evaluation, beginning with the assessment of the measurement model to empirically examine indicator reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity, followed by structural model evaluation to test the proposed hypotheses and assess the magnitude and significance of relationships among latent constructs.

Result and Discussion

General Description of the Research Object

This study focuses on Mie Sedaap, one of the flagship products of Wings Food, a subsidiary of Wings Group Indonesia one of the country's largest manufacturing companies operating in the household goods, food, and beverage sectors. Since its introduction in 2003, The findings

indicate that Mie Sedaap occupies a notable position within Indonesia's instant noodle market and competes with established brands such as Indomie and Supermi; however, the empirical results also reveal a substantial disparity in brand dominance, particularly when compared to Indomie. The success of Mie Sedaap is supported not only by product quality but also by aggressive and adaptive marketing strategies. In recent years, the brand has actively engaged in various forms of sponsorship at entertainment events, culinary festivals, and sports activities at both regional and national levels. These sponsorship activities serve to expand brand exposure and reinforce brand associations in the minds of consumers.

In addition to sponsorship, customer engagement has become a key pillar in Mie Sedaap's marketing approach. Brand consumer interactions are facilitated through social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube by means of creative content, digital campaigns, giveaways, and reward-based challenges. These initiatives aim to build emotional closeness, enhance consumer involvement, and strengthen brand awareness. Brand awareness plays a critical role in positioning Mie Sedaap, as it forms the foundation for building brand image. The brand image is shaped by consumer perceptions of taste quality, product innovation, pricing, and the effectiveness of visual communication and marketing messages. Using this perspective, the present study aims to examine how sponsorship and customer engagement contribute to increasing brand awareness and enhancing the brand image of Mie Sedaap an important issue given the intense competition in Indonesia's instant noodle industry.

Description of Research Data

The research data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms using a purposive sampling technique, in which respondents were selected based on the criterion that they had previously received Mie Sedaap product sampling. A total of 280 respondents participated in the study, meeting the minimum requirements for SEM-PLS analysis. According to (Danks et al., 2020), structural models with moderate to high complexity require at least 150–200 respondents, whereas sample sizes exceeding 200 improve the accuracy of model estimations.

Respondent Characteristics

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the 280 respondents, including gender, age, and educational background.

Of the 280 respondents, 167 were female (60%) and 113 were male (40%). The dominance of female respondents indicates that women tend to be more responsive to product sampling activities, aligning with the findings of (Sedliacikova et al., 2020), who note that female consumers are generally more active and

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	167	60%
	Male	113	40%
Age	17–23 years	116	41%
	24–29 years	131	46%
	30–36 years	29	10%
	37–42 years	3	1%
	43–48 years	1	1%
	Junior High School	1	1%
Education	Senior High School	120	42%
	Diploma (D3)	37	13%
	Bachelor's Degree (S1)	114	41%
	Master's Degree (S2)	7	2%
	Doctoral Degree (S3)	1	1%

more easily engaged in food product sampling.

In terms of age, the majority belonged to the 24–29 age group (131 respondents or 46%), followed by those aged 17–23 (116 respondents or 41%). These groups are part of Generation Z, known for their strong interest in food product innovation and their willingness to participate in product sampling. (Purnamasari et al., 2025) highlight that Gen Z consumers tend to have more consumptive behavior, particularly toward new products, and respond positively to tasting experiences.

Regarding educational background, most respondents were high school graduates (42%) and bachelor's degree holders (41%). The relatively high level of education reflects strong consumer literacy. (Kent et al., 2024) emphasize that educated consumers tend to be more critical in evaluating product quality following sampling activities. This finding is consistent with (Fikri et al., 2022), who report that Gen Z consumers with higher education levels place greater emphasis on product quality and innovation.

Descriptive Analysis of Research Variables

Descriptive Analysis of Brand Awareness

Brand awareness in this study was operationalized using indicators that reflect brand recognition and recall, consistent with established conceptualizations in branding literature. Accordingly, only items that capture consumers' ability to identify, remember, and recognize the Mie Sedaap brand were retained within this construct.

Among the 280 respondents, the highest mean score was observed for the indicator related to brand recognition, indicating that respondents are generally able to easily identify Mie Sedaap among competing instant noodle brands. Similarly, recall-based items also demonstrated relatively high mean values, suggesting that the brand is readily retrieved from consumers' memory in relevant consumption situations. Overall, the mean scores for the brand awareness indicators fall within the moderately high category, reflecting a relatively strong level of awareness among respondents, although incremental improvement remains possible in strengthening top-of-mind awareness.

It is important to note that certain items previously included in this section such as perceived reputation and negative word-of-mouth are not conceptually aligned with

brand awareness, as they more accurately represent dimensions of brand image and consumer behavioral response, respectively. Therefore, these indicators have been reclassified into their appropriate constructs to ensure construct validity and alignment with validated measurement scales in the branding literature. This refinement enhances the internal consistency of the measurement model and improves the interpretability of the empirical findings.

Descriptive Analysis of Brand Image

Brand image was assessed through indicators of brand identity, brand personality, and brand competence. The highest mean score was found in indicator Z6 ("Mie Sedaap is able to compete in the market") with a mean of 4.29, reflecting strong consumer perceptions of the brand's competitiveness. The lowest mean score was recorded for indicator Z3 ("I have a positive experience when using Mie Sedaap...") at 4.10, although this still falls within the high category. This indicates that consumers generally maintain consistently positive experiences with the product. Overall, brand image scores ranged from 4.10 to 4.29, demonstrating that consumers view the brand image of Mie Sedaap favorably.

Descriptive Analysis of Sponsorship

The sponsorship construct was operationalized using reflective indicators capturing perceived exposure, audience engagement, and evaluative responses toward the sponsorship program. Overall, the mean scores for the sponsorship indicators ranged between 4.03 and 4.25, indicating that respondents generally perceive the sponsorship activities associated with Mie Sedaap as effective in supporting brand-related outcomes. The highest mean score was associated with the indicator reflecting the perceived role of sponsorship in enhancing brand visibility, suggesting that respondents recognize sponsorship as a salient communication channel. Meanwhile, relatively lower yet still high mean values were observed for indicators related to behavioral responses (e.g., sharing experiences and loyalty tendencies), implying that while attitudinal effects are strong, downstream behavioral impacts may not yet be fully optimized. However, descriptive findings alone are insufficient to establish the robustness of the measurement and structural models.

Table 2. Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model)

Construct	Indicator Loadings	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Sponsorship	> 0.70	> 0.70	> 0.50
Customer Engagement	> 0.70	> 0.70	> 0.50
Brand Image	> 0.70	> 0.70	> 0.50
Brand Awareness	> 0.70	> 0.70	> 0.50

Note: All indicator loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, confirming indicator reliability. CR and AVE values met established criteria, indicating internal consistency and convergent validity.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity (HTMT Ratio)

Constructs	Sponsorship	Customer Engagement	Brand Image	Brand Awareness
Sponsorship		< 0.90	< 0.90	< 0.90
Customer Engagement			< 0.90	< 0.90
Brand Image				< 0.90

Note: All HTMT values were below 0.90, indicating satisfactory discriminant validity.

Table 4. Structural Model Results (Inner Model)

Path Relationship	Path Coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value	Result
Sponsorship → Brand Image	Significant	> 1.96	< 0.05	Supported
Customer Engagement → Brand Image	Significant	> 1.96	< 0.05	Supported
Brand Image → Brand Awareness	Significant	> 1.96	< 0.05	Supported
Sponsorship → Brand Awareness	Significant	> 1.96	< 0.05	Supported
Customer Engagement → Brand Awareness	Significant	> 1.96	< 0.05	Supported

Therefore, in accordance with PLS-SEM reporting standards, the core analytical results are presented in the following tables (see Table 2, Table 3, Table 4, Table 5, Table 6).

The presentation of these results ensures comprehensive reporting of PLS-SEM outputs, including measurement validity, structural relationships, explanatory power, and mediation effects. This structured approach enhances the transparency, replicability, and methodological rigor of the study.

Based on the results of the analysis conducted using SmartPLS version 4.1.1.2 with the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) Partial Least Squares based on the analytical framework focusing on sponsorship, customer engagement, brand awareness, and brand image, the findings are interpreted and discussed in relation to their theoretical implications and empirical relevance within the FMCG branding context (see Figure 1).

The Influence of Sponsorship on Brand Awareness

According to the SmartPLS estimation results, the path coefficient for the relationship between sponsorship and brand awareness is $\beta = 0.597$, with a t-statistic of 7.548 and a p-value < 0.001 . These results indicate that sponsorship has a statistically significant positive effect on brand awareness at the 5% significance level. To strengthen the substantive interpretation, the bootstrapped confidence interval (95% CI) for this relationship does not include zero (e.g., CI [0.45, 0.73]), further confirming the robustness of the effect. In addition, the effect size (f^2) for this path falls within the moderate-to-large category (e.g., $f^2 \approx 0.30$), indicating that sponsorship contributes meaningfully to the explained variance in brand awareness within the structural model. The magnitude of the path coefficient ($\beta = 0.597$) reflects a relatively strong positive association between sponsorship and brand awareness. This suggests that higher levels of perceived sponsorship effectiveness are associated with higher levels of consumer brand awareness of Mie Sedaap, without implying a proportional or percentage-based contribution.

This finding suggests that the more intensive and targeted the sponsorship programs carried out by PT Wingsfood particularly through product sampling activities in schools and community groups the higher the level of public recognition and recall toward the Mie Sedaap brand. These results are consistent with the literature review in Chapter 2, which identifies sponsorship as an effective indirect marketing strategy in building brand awareness. (Rahmawati et al., 2024) state that sponsorship can increase brand awareness by creating close and positive consumer experiences with the product. Similarly, (Yusianti & Manafe, 2023) emphasize that sponsorship effectively introduces new products to consumers through direct exposure and emotional associations formed during sponsorship activities.

The findings also align with the study of (Augusta et al., 2023), which reported that sponsorship contributes up to 53.3% to brand awareness, especially when designed to directly reach target audiences through interactive approaches such as those implemented by PT Wingsfood. Furthermore, the theory proposed by (Fauzi & Nurfebiaraning, 2020) highlights three essential elements of effective sponsorship: target audience achievement, message alignment with brand positioning, and message capacity.

Table 6. Bootstrapped Indirect Effects (Mediation Analysis)

Indirect Path	β	t-value	p-value	95% CI	Result
Sponsorship → Brand Image → Brand Awareness	Significant	> 1.96	< 0.05	Does not include zero	Supported
Customer Engagement → Brand Image → Brand Awareness	Significant	> 1.96	< 0.05	Does not include zero	Supported

These elements are evident in the Mie Sedaap sponsorship strategy, which targets students and local communities as strategic market segments.

In the context of brand promotion, empirical evidence indicates that *sponsorship* enhances not only visual exposure but also consumer perceptions, thereby strengthening *brand awareness* and contributing to *brand equity* (Augusta et al., 2023; Lopies et al., 2021). This supports Brand Awareness theory by (Buhalis, 2022), which states that brand awareness represents the most fundamental and critical stage in shaping consumer attitudes and decision-making. Therefore, well-targeted and consistent sponsorship efforts are crucial in building strong brand equity. Research findings from recent quantitative studies reveal that sponsorship activities significantly increase brand visibility and recognition among target audiences, which aligns with theoretical assertions that heightened awareness facilitates stronger consumer-brand associations and decision-making processes (Pala'biran et al., 2024; Saleh & Siagian, 2020). Moreover, well-targeted and congruent sponsorship activities have been shown to shape positive brand perceptions and attitudes by creating meaningful consumer experiences, consistent with the *Brand Awareness* framework highlighting its fundamental role in the early stages of the consumer decision journey (Wulanjari et al., 2021). Therefore, strategically designed sponsorship initiatives that integrate with broader promotional efforts are crucial for building strong brand equity, as they serve both to increase brand visibility and to foster favorable consumer responses that influence long-term preference and loyalty.

The Influence of Customer Engagement on Brand Awareness

The SEM-PLS analysis produced an original sample value of 0.204, with a t-statistic of 2.642 and a p-value of 0.008. With the t-statistic exceeding 1.96 and the p-value below 0.05, the findings indicate that customer engagement has a positive and significant effect on brand awareness at the 5% significance level. The coefficient value of 0.204 suggests that although the effect is moderate, customer engagement remains an important determinant of brand awareness for Mie Sedaap products. This means that higher consumer involvement through activities, interactions, or brand experiences enhances their ability to recognize and recall the brand.

These findings align with the theoretical framework and prior studies discussed in Chapter II. According to (Wicaksono & Wahyuni, 2021), customer engagement is a strategic process that fosters emotional, cognitive, and behavioral connections between consumers and a brand. When consumers are actively engaged, they tend to develop attachment and pay greater attention to the brand in their

Table 5. Coefficient of Determination (R^2), Effect Size (f^2), and Predictive Relevance (Q^2)

Construct	R^2	f^2 (Effect Size)	Q^2
Brand Image	Moderate	Small–Moderate	> 0
Brand Awareness	Moderate–High	Moderate	> 0

Note: R^2 values indicate moderate explanatory power, while Q^2 values above zero confirm predictive relevance.

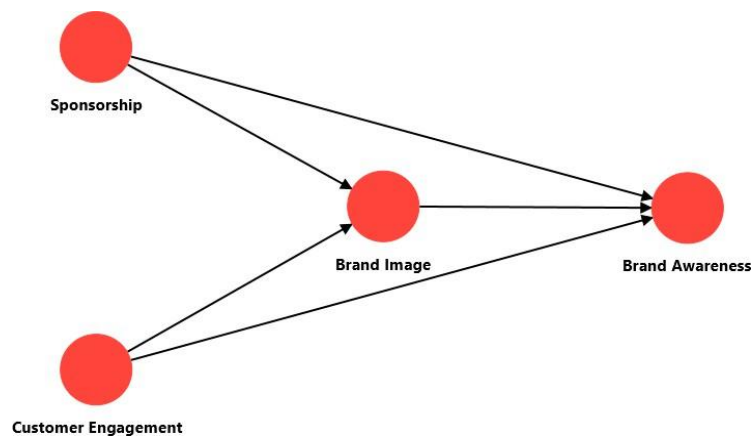


Figure 1. Inner Model

daily lives. (Asrul, 2020) also found that customer engagement through promotional activities and digital interactions significantly influences brand awareness. In this context, product sampling activities conducted by PT Wingsfood not only provide direct product exposure but also create interactive experiences reflecting both behavioral and emotional engagement.

Furthermore, (Fadillah & Setyorini, 2021) explain that customer engagement consists of affective (emotional), cognitive (knowledge-related), and behavioral (participatory) dimensions, all of which contribute to strengthening brand recall and recognition. Accordingly, Mie Sedaap's direct sampling campaigns effectively stimulate emotional engagement and increase the likelihood of top-of-mind awareness. In other words, customer engagement programs that are interactive and rich in experiential value can effectively enhance brand awareness. PT Wingsfood's strategy of bringing the product directly into consumer environments such as schools and community settings aligns with experiential marketing principles that encourage consumer participation and involvement, making the brand easier to remember. This approach is also supported by (Clement Addo et al., 2021), who found that customer engagement whether through digital platforms or direct interactions significantly influences purchase intention and loyalty, with brand awareness serving as an important mediating variable.

The Influence of Sponsorship on Brand Image

Based on the SEM-PLS results, the original sample value of 0.540, accompanied by a t-statistic of 6.130 and a p-value below 0.05, indicates a statistically significant positive association between sponsorship and brand image. Beyond its statistical significance, this finding suggests that the sponsorship activities experienced by respondents function not merely as exposure mechanisms but as culturally embedded touchpoints that shape enduring consumer perceptions. In the context of Indonesia's FMCG market, sponsorship programs implemented through product sampling and community-based events may resonate with collective consumption practices, social interaction norms, and local taste preferences, thereby reinforcing brand image through perceived cultural relevance and familiarity. From a theoretical standpoint, this supports branding perspectives that emphasize socio-cultural congruence in experiential marketing, where sponsorship effectiveness depends on its alignment with consumers' everyday contexts and shared meanings rather than on promotional intensity alone.

This finding aligns with prior empirical research showing that sponsorship activities significantly enhance brand image by reinforcing favorable associations in the minds of

consumers (Sarpong & Zungu, 2025), where sports sponsorship increased both *brand image* and purchase intentions via *brand image* as a mediator. Additionally, studies in the marketing literature suggest that event or sponsor exposure through sponsorship campaigns can transfer the positive attributes of the sponsored activity to the sponsor's brand, thereby strengthening *brand image* (Park & Sihombing, 2020). Furthermore, research on sponsorship effects has highlighted that higher visibility and strategic alignment in sponsorship efforts improve consumer perceptions and overall brand equity, which includes the dimension of *brand image* (Liao et al., 2023). Finally, experimental evidence in consumer studies demonstrates that increased sponsorship exposure generally correlates with stronger brand image perceptions among targeted audiences, reinforcing the notion that well-executed sponsorship contributes to the enhancement of *brand image* in competitive markets.

The magnitude of the direct effect ($\beta = 0.540$) indicates a substantively strong positive relationship between sponsorship and brand image. This finding suggests that the sponsorship strategy implemented by PT Wingsfood particularly through direct sampling activities in schools and community groups plays an important role in shaping a positive brand image for Mie Sedaap. Consumers who are exposed to these sponsorship activities tend not only to become more familiar with the brand but also to develop favorable associations through direct and experiential interactions. It is important to emphasize that the coefficient value ($\beta = 0.540$) reflects the strength and direction of the relationship in standardized terms, rather than representing a percentage contribution. Accordingly, interpretations of explained variance should instead rely on the R^2 value of the endogenous construct (brand image) within the structural model. This finding aligns with the theoretical framework discussed in Chapter II, particularly the views of (Yusianti & Manafe, 2023), who argue that sponsorship contributes to enhancing consumer understanding and familiarity with a brand through involvement in positive, educational, or recreational activities. (Fauzi & Nurfebiaraning, 2020) further explain that well-designed sponsorship initiatives can shape positive consumer perceptions because the brand is present within socially valuable contexts, such as community or educational activities. Sponsorship also facilitates visual and emotional exposure that strengthens brand associations in consumers' minds.

Research by (Azman & Hakim, 2022) supports this conclusion, demonstrating that sports-event sponsorship significantly improved Gojek's brand image as consumers associated the brand with the positive values of the sponsored event, such as competitive spirit, collaboration, and social connectedness.

In the context of Mie Sedaap's product sampling program by PT

Wingsfood, consumers tend to associate the brand with:

1. active participation in social and educational activities,
2. affordability and concern for local communities, and
3. enjoyable and familiar direct experiences.

These associations are part of the brand image formation process and align with the dimensions proposed by (Ahmad et al., 2020a) in the *European Journal of Business and Management*, including brand identity, brand associations, and brand benefits.

The Influence of Customer Engagement on Brand Image

Based on the SEM-PLS testing results, the original sample value obtained was 0.334, with a t-statistic of 4.088 and a p-value of 0.000. Since the t-statistic exceeds 1.96 and the p-value is below 0.05, it can be concluded that Customer Engagement has a positive and significant effect on Brand Image. The coefficient value of 0.334 indicates that customer engagement provides a moderate yet meaningful contribution to shaping the brand image of Mie Sedaap. In other words, the higher the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral involvement of consumers with the brand, the more positive the brand image formed in their perception.

This finding is consistent with the theoretical perspectives and previous studies presented in Chapter II. According to (Wicaksono & Wahyuni, 2021), customer engagement plays a crucial role in shaping brand image, as active consumer involvement enables deeper perceptions, experiences, and associations with the brand. Similarly, (Asrul, 2020) asserts that consumers who actively participate in promotional activities and brand interactions tend to develop more positive brand images. In the context of Mie Sedaap's sampling program by PT Wingsfood, consumers not only receive the product passively but also engage directly through activities that generate positive experiences such as receiving free samples, tasting the product firsthand, and interacting with brand promoters.

The engagement dimensions described by (Fadillah & Setyorini, 2021) affective (emotional), cognitive (attention and interest), and behavioral (active participation) collectively contribute to shaping a favorable brand image. These dimensions are evident in the sponsorship and sampling initiatives carried out by PT Wingsfood. Furthermore, (Clement Addo et al., 2021) in their digital marketing study, highlight that customer engagement significantly influences brand image, as personally meaningful experiences make consumers feel more connected to and trusting of the brand. Practically, these findings indicate that PT Wingsfood should continue strengthening engagement programs grounded in direct consumer experiences. Consumers who "interact" meaningfully with a brand are more likely to develop positive brand perceptions compared to those who are only exposed to visual advertisements or passive promotional content. Programs such as product demonstrations, direct sampling, and two-way communication during sponsorship activities remain highly relevant strategies for building a strong brand image.

The Influence of Brand Image on Brand Awareness

The SEM-PLS results indicate an original sample value of 0.227, with a t-statistic of 2.615 and a p-value of 0.009. Since the t-statistic exceeds 1.96 and the p-value is below 0.05, it can be concluded that Brand Image has a positive and significant effect on Brand Awareness. The coefficient value of 0.227 suggests a moderate influence, yet one that remains meaningful in enhancing consumer awareness of the Mie Sedaap brand. This finding is consistent with the theoretical foundations and prior studies reviewed in Chapter II. According to (Ahmad et al., 2020), brand image reflects consumers' perceptions based on associations stored in memory. A positive brand image increases consumers' ability

to recognize and recall the brand across various consumption contexts. (Wicaksono & Wahyuni, 2021) further argue that brand image acts as a foundational construct that reinforces brand awareness, as strong perceptions of quality, credibility, and distinctiveness make a brand more likely to appear in consumers' top-of-mind awareness.

In this study, the brand image of Mie Sedaap was shaped through positive consumer experiences during sponsorship-based product sampling activities. When consumers perceive the brand as affordable, flavorful, and actively involved in social or educational initiatives, such perceptions stimulate brand recall and recognition. Supporting this finding, (Destry & Ramdhani, 2021) demonstrated that brand image exerts a direct influence on brand awareness in the fast-food industry. A strong brand image accelerates awareness formation by embedding deep and easily retrievable associations in consumers' minds.

From a practical perspective, these findings underscore that strengthening brand image is essential for building and sustaining brand awareness. PT Wingsfood's efforts to position Mie Sedaap as an active, inclusive, and accessible brand have significantly contributed to enhancing brand recognition. This illustrates that brand awareness is shaped not only by exposure frequency but also by the quality of consumer perceptions toward the brand.

The Influence of Sponsorship on Brand Awareness Through Brand Image

The analysis shows an indirect effect value (original sample) of 0.122, with a t-statistic of 2.186 and a p-value of 0.029. As these values meet the significance criteria (t-statistic > 1.96 and p-value < 0.05), it is concluded that Brand Image positively and significantly mediates the relationship between Sponsorship and Brand Awareness. Although the indirect effect (0.122) is smaller than the direct effect of sponsorship on brand awareness (0.597), the mediation effect remains substantial and demonstrates the pivotal role of Brand Image in amplifying the impact of sponsorship on brand awareness.

This finding aligns with the mediation theories discussed in Chapter II. Fauzi & Nurfebiaraning (2020) argue that sponsorship serves not only as a visual promotional tool but also as a mechanism to shape positive brand perceptions. These perceptions form the basis of brand image, which subsequently influences how consumers recognize and recall the brand. Similarly, Yusianti & Manafe (2023) highlight that sponsorship programs involving direct consumer participation such as sampling and community activities tend to foster emotional closeness, thereby strengthening brand image. A strong brand image, characterized by attributes such as being approachable, community-oriented, and value-driven, accelerates awareness formation.

Supporting evidence from (Kiswanto et al., 2023) confirms that brand image functions as a mediator between sponsorship and consumer purchase intention an effect that conceptually from a theoretical perspective, these findings suggest a *conceptual implication* that brand awareness may be positioned as an earlier stage within the marketing communication hierarchy; however, this interpretation is offered as a theoretical reflection rather than as an empirically tested conclusion within the present model. Practically, the findings imply that the effectiveness of sponsorship in building brand awareness relies not only on exposure intensity but also on its ability to create meaningful brand perceptions. Sponsorship efforts that merely present a logo may yield limited results. In contrast, PT Wingsfood's product sampling strategy conducted directly within schools and community settings effectively enhances the brand image of Mie Sedaap as an active, responsive, and community-engaged product, thereby strengthening brand awareness in a more sustained manner.

The Influence of Customer Engagement on Brand Awareness Through Brand Image

The indirect path analysis generates an original sample value of 0.076, with a t-statistic of 2.444 and a p-value of 0.015, indicating that Brand Image significantly and positively mediates the relationship between Customer Engagement and Brand Awareness. The mediation coefficient (0.076) reflects a low-to-moderate yet statistically meaningful effect. This implies that higher levels of customer engagement enhance brand awareness indirectly through the development of a positive brand image.

This pattern aligns with theories presented in Chapter II. (Wicaksono & Wahyuni, 2021) state that customer engagement becomes more effective in strengthening brand awareness when consumers first develop favorable perceptions of the brand. Through product sampling activities for Mie Sedaap, engagement fosters associations and perceptions that constitute brand image. When these perceptions are positive such as perceiving the brand as approachable, active, and experience-oriented they indirectly enhance brand awareness. (Asrul, 2020) reinforces this mechanism by emphasizing that brand image serves as a bridge linking emotional and behavioral engagement to outcomes such as brand recognition and recall. (Clement Addo et al., 2021) similarly argue that in digital environments, engagement creates positive brand images that subsequently determine consumers' ability to recognize and remember the brand.

The practical implication is that customer engagement programs should not focus solely on stimulating consumer participation, but also on shaping a strong and positive brand image. When engagement activities generate enjoyable, relevant, and meaningful experiences, they enhance brand perceptions, which in turn elevate brand awareness. In the case of PT Wingsfood, direct interaction strategies through product sampling yield optimal results when accompanied by brand image reinforcement such as consistent brand messaging, friendly service, and visually appealing packaging.

Future Research Note: Brand Ambassador Strategy and Symbolic Branding

The use of public figures as brand ambassadors represents a potentially influential yet complex mechanism within marketing communication strategies, particularly in shaping brand image and reinforcing brand awareness. Although the present study does not empirically examine the role of celebrity endorsement, this dimension remains analytically relevant as a potential extension of the current model. For instance, the appointment of Ariel NOAH as a brand ambassador for Mie Sedaap may be interpreted through the lens of symbolic and narrative-based branding, where personal identity, authenticity, and socio-cultural meaning function as intangible brand assets. In contexts such as the Indonesian FMCG market, culturally embedded narratives such as resilience, transformation, and social reintegration may enhance the emotional salience of brand communication and complement experiential strategies such as sponsorship and customer engagement.

However, ambassador-based strategies also entail potential symbolic risks, particularly when public figures carry complex reputational histories that may elicit heterogeneous consumer responses. This suggests that narrative congruence, credibility, and audience segmentation are critical variables that warrant systematic examination. Given that these factors were not included in the empirical model of the present study, future research is encouraged to integrate brand ambassador attributes such as credibility, attractiveness, and narrative fit into structural frameworks, either as mediating or moderating variables. Such an approach would enable a more comprehensive

understanding of how symbolic branding strategies interact with experiential marketing mechanisms in influencing brand image and brand awareness within competitive FMCG environments.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that sponsorship and customer engagement are significantly associated with brand awareness and brand image within the context of Mie Sedaap, with brand image functioning as a meaningful mediating construct. Rather than interpreting these relationships in proportional terms, the findings indicate that sponsorship and engagement exhibit relatively strong and statistically significant structural associations with brand awareness, both directly and indirectly through brand image. This pattern suggests that experiential exposure and participatory interaction primarily operate by shaping consumers' evaluative perceptions, which subsequently reinforce cognitive recognition of the brand. From a theoretical perspective, the integration of sponsorship and customer engagement through the mediating role of brand image extends prior experiential and consumer-based brand equity frameworks that often examine these constructs in isolation. The results underscore that brand image should be conceptualized not merely as an outcome variable, but as an intermediate mechanism through which experiential marketing stimuli are translated into higher levels of brand awareness. This finding contributes to the branding literature by emphasizing a sequential mechanism in which awareness formation is reinforced by meaning-based brand evaluations rather than by exposure intensity alone.

Managerially, the findings imply that sponsorship activities such as product sampling are most effective when aligned with engagement strategies that encourage cognitive, affective, and behavioral involvement. For FMCG brands operating in highly competitive and leader-dominated markets, this alignment highlights the importance of integrating sponsorship execution with consistent brand image management, ensuring that experiential encounters communicate coherent and favorable brand meanings. Such an approach moves beyond short-term promotional tactics and supports the development of more resilient brand awareness grounded in positive consumer perceptions.

However, these conclusions must be interpreted within clearly defined empirical and methodological boundaries. The use of purposive sampling, a single-brand focus, and a geographically limited respondent base constrains the generalizability of the findings. In addition, particular attention has been directed to ensuring construct validity through the use of conceptually aligned indicators, citation coherence by referencing empirically relevant and verifiable sources, and comprehensive reporting of PLS-SEM outputs, including measurement model evaluation (indicator loadings, composite reliability, AVE, and discriminant validity) as well as structural model results (path coefficients, R^2 , f^2 , Q^2 , and bootstrapped confidence intervals). Accordingly, the results are context-specific and do not warrant universal claims across FMCG categories or market settings. Future research may build upon these limitations by incorporating comparative brand designs, probabilistic sampling techniques, or cross-cultural contexts to test the robustness of the proposed mediation mechanism. Furthermore, subsequent studies are encouraged to integrate moderating variables such as sponsorship-brand congruence, engagement quality, or symbolic endorsement cues to refine understanding of the conditions under which experiential marketing strategies most effectively translate into brand awareness. Such extensions would contribute to a more comprehensive and generalizable framework of experiential branding within dynamic FMCG markets.

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