

Socially Conscious Branding as Intellectual Capital: Gender Mainstreaming Strategy for Sustainable Business

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Abstract

Structural poverty is a social problem often caused by economic complexity. Skill, occupation, and entrepreneurship are important instruments of sustainable business. The research was conducted through a normative juridical approach and empirical observation during the Global Alliance of Justice Education Conference 2019 in "KITA DESIGN", a non-profit organization that provides alternative jobs for oppressed women and women who were being prostituted. This research found that social purpose is a powerful tool in developing socially conscious branding and gender mainstreaming strategy implemented in fostering women's entrepreneurial roles creates multiplier effects and contribute positively to their economic empowerment to grow above economic complexity. The research reveals that socially conscious branding has a positive impact in creating a strong product identity and enhancing women's participation in economic activities, articulating creativity, innovation, entrepreneurship, solidarity, and bravery to take charge of their empowerment and wellbeing. Further, the formulations of more approachable access to the formal financial institution and governmental support for gender intentional and socially conscious business are needed to support women empowerment, economic development, and well-being of society.

Keywords: *Gender Mainstreaming Strategy; Socially Conscious Branding; Sustainable Business; Economic Empowerment.*

Introduction

As the Covid-19 pandemic severely hit the global economy, the world now facing the greater challenge of poverty and unemployment, the health crisis that turns into a multidimensional crisis currently causes millions of people to fall into poverty and unemployment [1]. Central Bureau Statistics of Indonesia released data showing that the country's unemployment stood 7,05 million out of the workforce of 133.56 million on the previous year. Meanwhile, 9,22 % of the population, or 24,79 million people lived in poverty, and further Finance Minister Sri Mulyani stated under "bad" scenario, 1.1 million people will fall into poverty and 2.9 million people would add to unemployment [2] According to data released by Indonesia's Central Statistical Agency, Indonesia's relative poverty figure fell to 9,82 % of the total population in 2018, Thus, there are up to 25,95 million Indonesians categorized as "poor population"[3]. The poorest people are dominated by women workers, domestic workers, and housewives in the village, young women, and poor women in urban areas [4].

World Bank defines poverty broadly as the deprivation in wellbeing [5] and further Chambers perceived poverty as an integrated concept consists of 5 elements: poverty itself, dependency /physical limitation, isolation, state of emergency, and lack of power/ powerless [6]. Numerous studies shows that promotion of women

empowerment through several platforms from educational, political and economic have a positive impact on poverty reduction in several countries [7, 8] yet most of the previous studies emphasized on entrepreneurship [9] or specifically on “women-preneursip [10]

Consider that little is yet known about how the humanistic and purposeful aspect of brand potentially becomes the strong drive for business for its strong association with trust, social responsibility, personal values, and higher purpose, therefore, this research aims to analyze how socially conscious branding contributes as a benefactor in the implementation of Gender Mainstreaming Strategy (GMS) through entrepreneurship and the development of sustainable yet conscious business and vice versa how social consciousness of a brand contributes to its strengths due to the current tendency of consumers that shows preferred strong brands should not be "empty or hollow in meaning" [11]

Methodology

The research was conducted through document analysis, analytical and systematic data analysis supported by normative juridical approach, and empirical observation. Analytical description used to describe social consciousness as consumer tendency and how social purpose implemented through gender mainstreaming strategy foster entrepreneurship and shared prosperity and women empowerment. The data were collected and examined through a literature study to provide supporting theoretical frameworks as well as validating the objective of the study. The authors relied on databases of Web of Sciences, Scopus, Emerald, and other publications related to the research enrich by the observation during field trip to "KITA DESIGN" in Bandung during the Global Alliance of Justice Education in December 2019.

Findings and Discussions

The Global Consumer Tendency to Socially Conscious Brands and the Impact on Women Empowerment.

A consumer – based definition of a brand famously states by Keller define a brand as "a set of the mental association held by consumers, which add to the image or perceived value of a product or service [12]. There is consensus that consumers' awareness of brand purpose is increasingly pertinent. Consumers perceived brand purpose not only according to sentence or profile crafted by the company but more as the reason for which a brand exists. Consumers have become more socially conscious and purposeful concerning their purchase of products and services [13]. Consumers are increasingly embrace social consciousness from the brands [14] influenced by the rise of various values like minimalism, zero waste, and mindful living awareness promotes broadly on social media [15]. Brands need to radiate Brands need to radiate and articulate their passion and commitment to generate the intentional purchase. Thus it's highly important to enrich the brand with consciousness and purposes also to effectively articulate these purposes and intentions to the market [16]. Horizon Media's Finger on the Pulse Study shows the strong tendency of 80 % of millennial who expecting companies to engage in public commitment regarding good corporate citizenship, Forbes mentions the preference of consumers to spend money at companies that do good things and support good causes over ones that offer goods products [17]. A socially conscious consumer aspires to brands with a particular mindset, values, and purpose; therefore businesses and products need to make a clear statement about what they do and why.

The brand narrative is the key for consumer engagement, in the era of uptight market competition and overflowing information, communicating and articulating the value and purpose of the brand is paramount important in establishing brand equity

and profit for stories have a great and persuasive effects [18], this persuasive effect expectedly influence consumers' buying decision to support business sustainability.

In the term of women empowerment as social purpose through entrepreneurship, there are several attempts to reconcile and integrate business profit, economic growth, and social responsibility. Current tendency shows that how a socially conscious business contributes to economic growth and social responsibilities gain both good corporate reputation and brand images [19]. Furthermore, studies found a positive relationship between social responsibility and corporate image with purchase intention, escalation of brand value, and consumer trust. Corporate image is a complex concept which covers corporate identity, individuality, and marketing communication [20]. The corporate image has a positive effect on purchase intentions [21] and becomes a critical component of successful and sustainable business for it is strongly believed that modern businesses have responsibilities to society and to reinforce social values beyond their obligations to the shareholders or investors.

Social consciousness also as a business approach where a company works for the common good instead of being profit-centric, several benefits emerge from business alignment to social purpose, for example, the elevating of company's reputation, brand value, and profit [22]. The survey conducted by Edelman's Brand included 48 multinational brands, plus approximately 30 local brands in each of 8 countries: UK, the USA, India, Germany, France, China, Canada and Brazil, shows that 92 % of 11.000 consumers desire brands to be more effective in sharing and articulating their values [23]. Further study of Harvard Business sponsored by Ernst and Young Beacon Institute reveals that 85 % of the 474 business executives strongly agree that they are more likely to recommend an intentional company with a strong value and purpose [24].

The growing tendency on how social consciousness positively impacts competitive power and advantage in the global market is a massive opportunity to be embraced in women empowerment through market-based development. Study shows that market – based development has a positive impact on the levels of empowerment, independence, literacy and general health of women [25] while in the same time provide greater opportunity for women workers, entrepreneurs, and small business to participate in the new market and economic activities in general. Being included in economic activities especially in generating income has transformative effects for women. Providing women with the right mindset and skill set to generate income is critical to women empowerment as well as poverty eradication [26]. Research shows a significant impact on women's participation in economic, business, employment and entrepreneurial activities not only for themselves and their families but also for the economic development in general and for the society in the term of increasing their social well-being [27].

A brand that articulates gender intentional development are great tools of business, but this need to be supported by knowledge, in the broadest way possible, this requires sufficient knowledge of the product creator, brand developer, producer, entrepreneur, consumers and society in general. World Bank study on 1998 – 1999 found that knowledge matters and has intrinsic values [28]. In this knowledge - based economic era, the exploration and utilization of knowledge and resources has shifted so far that puts knowledge as the one of the most important factors determining the escalation of standard of living more than other capitals like tools, land, inventory and labor. Knowledge creates intellectual properties and a robust intellectual property rights regime is beneficial to economic development although this still depend on how effective the implementation of intellectual property protection [29]. Women empowerment through product creation and the development of socially conscious brands require financial tools to develop productivity, economic resilience, bargaining power, and resource allocation in transforming social values into economic. Research shows that entrepreneurship and competitiveness is effective to enhance productivity, capacity and, a higher rate of economic development [30].

Women Empowerment through the Development of Socially Conscious Branding and Entrepreneurship: a Story from Indonesia

“KITA DESIGNS” is an example from Indonesia of how entrepreneurship for women and socially conscious branding for the products create spillover effects. (<https://www.kitadesigns.net/blog>) Established in May 2017 “KITA DESIGNS” is a holistic and socially conscious non – profit organization that provides alternative jobs for oppressed women and women who were being prostituted in Bandung. “KITA” name taken from Indonesia language (Bahasa) means “US”. In Bahasa, there are 2 (two) ways of saying "US": "KITA" and "KAMI" with a sort of different meaning and application. "KAMI" used to describe "US" as an exclusive group, KAMI is an "exclusive us" whereas KITA used to describe "inclusive us" which can cover anyone, all of us without excluding anyone from the group.

The focus of “KITA Designs” is a holistic restoration; therefore they don't just provide shelter or a safe house for these women but a lot more than that. They are taught valuable skills from budgeting, parenting, computer, English, and how to create, design, and produce various products like accessories, home goods, masks, scarves, cosmetic bags, coasters, bowl, headbands, pillowcase, and many others as well as receive counseling, encouragement, prayer and fair wage while working in a safe environment. Even though KITA DESIGNS is a small business and they don't have thousands of production house to affect the state of fashion trends and accessories industries, their initiative in implementing socially responsible business model has started a conversation, and in the age of digital information, conversation broadly and easily spread like fire. “KITA DESIGNS” manages to show transparency and authenticity through online marketing, the participation of events relating to the relevant issue, and social media campaign, on the website they state *"Your purchase of USD 35 provides a salary for one week to create a better reality for these precious women"*.

"KITA DESIGNS" also embodied the spirit of solidarity by providing a platform for the community to get involved both in their social purpose and economic purpose by creating and raising the awareness of human trafficking, helping sell KITA products, teaching useful skills, and other kinds of supports to help KITA DESIGNS excel. “KITA DESIGNS” blends the social values into their organizational culture or the *“raison d’être”*, why the organization is formed. Women empowerment, social consciousness and solidarity become the shared values and beliefs among its stakeholders as the core of their existence as well as their mission.

Gender Mainstreaming Strategy and Gender Equality

Gender equality is an inseparable aspect of gender mainstreaming strategy. The equality on the term of employment and education for women contributes in fostering economic growth and to decrease household poverty level for both employment and education, provide better access to income and prosperity. The strong approach and emphasis on gender equality is highly crucial based on the fact that economic growth does not always provide the same level of upgrading [31] and macro-econometrics studies find the impact of economic growth on gender equality is inconsistent with gender equality and women empowerment, means that the women do not always get the same benefit from the rise of economic development [32].

Gender mainstreaming strategy is a concept, to enlarge its impact this strategy shall be transformed into an economically viable approach especially financial inclusion, access to economic capital to advance women's economic empowerment [33] Women's economic empowerment has paramount urgency because the fact shows that low economic conditions, lack of education, skills, and opportunity create conditions of vulnerability, unemployment, poverty, and sexual exploitation where women are at greatest risk. Particularly in Indonesia, It is reported that there are hundreds of thousands of Indonesians leave their families and villages to work, and

80 % of these Indonesians are women who migrate to get a job in big cities and abroad in domestic and caregiver sectors [34]. The high percentage proves that Indonesia still needs serious efforts in narrowing the gender gap put Gender Mainstreaming Strategy (GMS) as a necessity.

The guarantee of women's social and economic rights in Indonesia has been provided by Law Number 7 / 1984 on the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and Law Number 11 / 2005 on the Ratification of the Rights of the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Presidential Instruction Number 9 / 2000 of Indonesia on Gender Mainstreaming in National Development specifically put series of instructions to implement gender mainstreaming in National Development policies and program through synchronization of GMS into planning, organizing, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

Although the progress of gender equality in health in Indonesia shows relatively good results and gender equality in education rise to be the key achievement, Gender equality in employment, migration, and access to finance remain a challenge and require serious and strategic measures [35]. The average annual growth of women participating in the employment and labor market is higher than men, but despite the higher percentage, women continue to face more challenges from lower labor inclusion, higher unemployment rates, lower wages, the higher level of economic informality, and limited access to resources and financial capital. As consequence, women constitute most of the self-employed, domestic, and migrant workers, put them at a high level of financial risk and insecurity.

Gender Mainstreaming Strategy and Economic Development

World Development Report 2012 shows that gender equality and economic development are strongly linked, thus women empowerment, global awareness concerning poverty and social consciousness become the current mainstreaming of Gender Approach and Development (GAD). Caroline Moser introduces triple roles framework to develop the links between gender roles to gender needs by analyzing triple roles of women: reproductive roles, productive roles, and community roles in order to overcome the social, economic, cultural, and other problems by comprehensively formulate the holistic development through Gender Mainstreaming Strategy (GMS) [36].

Data shows that women are more likely to be unemployed than men, 2018 unemployed rates of women is at 6 % comparing to approximately 5,2 % unemployed rates of men [37] Women's empowerment has proven to be the pre-requisite for inclusive economic growth, the improvement of gender equality has been strongly linked with escalated human development and higher economic growth, and higher economic growth correlates positively to providing greater access to education, labor market and political participation [38]. Expanding women's economic opportunities can have a wide-ranging of benefits and create positive multiplier effects. The report shows that gender equality as SDGs Goal 5 are critical in achieving other SDGs goal especially Goal no 8 to promote full and productive employment and decent work for all, Goal 1 on ending poverty, and Goal 10 on reducing inequalities [39].

Creative business and home industries offer the opportunity of working close to home and relatively reasonable working hour that enables women to perform their domestic duties [40], this potentially engaging into current trends where Indonesia currently reinvents itself by developing new key driver in escalating economic growth During this last two decades, Indonesia highly focused on the creation and development of creative businesses and home industries following the fact that the creative economy became the most rapidly growing sector worldwide. In 2016 creative industry sector could provide employment for 16,2 million people and increased to 16,4 million in 2017 [41]. Creative sectors also proved to be effectively contributed to decreasing the rate of unemployment; in 2019 Indonesia has recorded the lowest unemployment rate. According to data from Central Statistical Agency, the

unemployment rate dropped to 5,01 % from 5,13 % in 2018, although the wage gap between genders still widely exists. Another important positive impact from creative businesses and home industries related to gender mainstreaming strategy is that these businesses provide a protective as well as a productive platform for women.

From the economic benefit perspective, during the several global economic recessions, creative businesses, and informal businesses of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) proved to be resilient during the global economic crisis and productively contributed to GDP through exports. From the perspective of providing job opportunities, creative businesses are able to absorb a high number of workforces from various backgrounds, including women and marginal communities with low educational backgrounds and skills and experiences. Thus, it's critically important to ensure that creative industries and enterprises optimally absorb the labor of unemployed and at-risk women as well as increase the prosperity of society.

Transformative Effects on Economic Participation and Inclusivity

It's critically important to develop women participation in economic activities and encourage women to be productive and to be economically independent as the acceptable and cherished social values in society. Having the right mindset and empowered with an adequate skill set prove to have a transformative effect and made women to be the fastest growing entrepreneurs in the world [42]. Women entrepreneurship has been acknowledged as an important indicator for development for its ability and potential in providing sensible jobs, wealth generation, poverty eradication, social development, education and social welfare as the ultimate, complete and sustainable success [43, 44].

Sharma argues that the development of these social values needs to be supported by the escalation of political empowerment, self-consciousness, and support from family, society also legal structure [45]. The study in Saudi Arabia has proven the great impact on economic and social empowerment as the result of the improvement of participation and empowerment of women in the political process to represent the needs, the rights, and the point of view of women in a political decision in assuring the academic empowerment [46].

There are some constraints faced by women entrepreneurs in developing economies despite their important contributions especially in low-income and middle-income economies. To overcome these constraints it's highly crucial to create a collaborative platform with the government and financial institutions [47]. Financial literacy is paramount important, but far more important is to make women financially including by providing financial inclusion for women to advance economic empowerment. Providing low-income and at-risk women with adequate financial tools can empower women to be more independent and provide them with greater control and allocation over useful resources [48].

To be able to allocate financial resource, women's direct and independent access to the financial source is critical to enable women to independently make financial choices, thus it's critically important to design adequate and appropriate financial products for women to perform economic activities both private and related to their entrepreneurial roles and broaden the economic opportunities available to them [49]. Access to formal financial institution is critical in expanding the resources available to finance productive initiatives led by women, this also promotes women's participation in business activities by providing working capital financing for productive projects. Andrade researched how financial innovation pioneering initiative supported by National Development Banks massively support women-led agricultural businesses by offering credit, guarantees, training, and technical assistant by optimizing its network of bank and non-bank financial intermediaries for financing or refinancing the credit for women and women-owned businesses [50].

In Indonesia, International Finance Corporation invested up to \$ 200 million in Bank OCBC NISP's sustainable bond program as the first-ever gender bond in

Indonesia that will enable Bank OCBC NISP to increase lending to women-led businesses with the intent of advancing their participation in the economic and prompt inclusive growth, this initiative also supported by the Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative, a partnership housed at the World Bank [51].

Lastly, studies show that governmental support at the implementation level is highly important for women's economic empowerment through the G2P or Government to People Approach by providing facilitation for comprehensive empowerment for example participatory governance initiatives that not just accommodating some affirmative policies [52] but also the actual developmental state of gender progressive participation in the form of practical interest and involvement in the decision – making process on matters that are relevant to their lives [53].

Conclusions

This research revealed that women are not a burden or detention in the development; they are highly potential forces and valuable assets. Developing talent and solidarity among women, investing in their capabilities, and providing appropriate opportunities to involve in the development of socially conscious brands would increase access to economic activities, decision making, and political participation as the implementation of gender mainstreaming strategy to support the well- being of society.

Socially conscious branding has a positive impact in creating strong product identity and enhances women's participation in economic activities. It articulates women's creativity, innovation, entrepreneurship, solidarity, and bravery to take charge of their economic empowerment, a socially conscious brand with gender intentional purpose generates higher consumer's loyalty, market power and sustainable business.

Gender mainstreaming strategy implementing in fostering woman's entrepreneurial roles creates multiplier effects and contribute positively to women economic empowerment. There is also strong urgency for approachable access to formal financial institution and governmental support to create socially conscious and sustainable business as the driving force of economic development and well- being of the society.

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