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Startup Branding: A Case Study of Pegipegi

Tri Wismiarsi[‡]
Muchsin Saggaff Shihab[§]
Holila Hatta*
Nathalia Tjandra[¶]

Abstract

This study examines the brand strategy of a startup firm in Indonesia, Pegipegi, an online travel agent, which provides travel ticket and hotel reservation services. The study was conducted in response to the fastest-growing startups in Indonesia, especially in e-commerce. A case study research method was used to investigate how this startup developed its brand and succeeded. The qualitative data were taken from websites, online news as well as advertisements in online and offline media. In addition, face-to-face interviews with public relations and media managers were also employed. The results show that Pegipegi has developed its brand through the improvement of its brand identity and positioning aimed at showing its differences from its competitors. Furthermore, it has created its brand experience and promises as an online travel agent that is user friendly, convenient and interactive. Marketing communication has been conducted through advertisement in online and offline channels to increase brand awareness and hence, purchasing. Customer rewards are given to maintain customer relationship and loyalty. Moreover, other marketing strategies, including alliance, service availability, co-branding, e-WOM, and business to business relationships, were also adopted by the startup company. This present study contributes to the existing startup branding research in Indonesia and could well be of interest in other national contexts.

Keywords: startup; branding; brand positioning; brand experience; customer relationship and loyalty; e-commerce.

Introduction

Branding is a process that leads to an organisation having unique character compared to its competitors (de Chernatony, 1999). A brand is defined as “an intangible, symbolic marketplace resource, imbued with meaning by stakeholders and the broader context in which it is embedded that enables users to project their identity goal(s) to one or more audiences” (Beverland, 2018, p.10). From the

[‡] Dr Tri Wismiarsi, Lecturer, Department of Management, Bakrie University, Indonesia. E-mail: tri.wismiarsi@gmail.com

[§] Dr Muchsin Saggaff Shihab, Lecturer, Department of Management, Bakrie University, Indonesia. E-mail: muchsin.shihab@bakrie.ac.id

* Dr Holila Hatta, Lecturer, Department of Management, Bakrie University, Indonesia. E-mail: holila.hatta@gmail.com

[¶] Dr Nathalia Tjandra, Associate Professor in Marketing, Edinburgh Napier University, United Kingdom. E-mail: N.Tjandra@napier.ac.uk



company perspective, a brand is “a cluster of functional and emotional values that enables organizations to make a promise about a unique and welcomed experience” (de Chernatony, McDonald, & Wallace, 2011, p.31). A good brand enables the organisation to achieve better performance in terms of brand awareness, quality, customer loyalty and positive associations of the brand (Aaker, 1996).

Generally, a brand is developed by large and/or global company over a fairly long period of time through maintaining its competitive edge (Chang & Ko, 2014). In response to changes and challenges in the business environment, good brand management is important not only for larger firms but also for SMEs (Abimbola & Vallaster, 2007; Merrilees, 2007; Odoom et al., 2017). With the increasing number and growth of startups in various parts of the world, their initiators have also come to realise that the brand strategy is important for the growth and success of their business (Rode & Vallaster, 2005; Rus et al., 2018; Ruzzier & Ruzzier, 2015).

Startups throughout the world grew very rapidly in 2018 compared to 2017, due to the disbursement of venture capital investment to the tune of US \$ 140 billion in 2018 (CNBC, 2018). Further, the US became the country with the largest number of unicorns in the world; 65 % of them are based in Indonesia. Unicorns refer to startups with a valuation exceeding US \$ 1.5 billion. The number of Indonesian startups has reached to 2,074, and this number puts Indonesia in the fifth position in the world, with the US ranked first, followed by India, Britain, and Canada, respectively (Databoks, 2019; Jpnn.com, 2019). Their growth in Indonesia is the fastest in Southeast Asia (Herman, 2018), and many of them are involved in the digital technology-based business and e-commerce (Databoks, 2019; The Jakarta Post, 2019). However, not many of these startups are successful and well known, one of the reasons being their lack of ability in the field of management, including branding (The Jakarta Post, 2019). For this reason, this present research is focused on the successful branding strategy of a startup in Indonesia.

Many studies on startups have been conducted on various topics, including innovation (Freeman & Engel, 2007; Pietro et al., 2017; Weiblen & Chesbrough, 2015), product development (Bosch et al., 2013; Van de Ven et al., 1984), investment (Pietro et al., 2017), the role of the entrepreneur in brand development (Rode & Vallaster, 2005), and branding (Rus et al., 2018; Ruzzier & Ruzzier, 2015). Different to recent studies on startup branding, which consider it from the dynamic and evolving point of view (Rus et al., 2018; Ruzzier & Ruzzier, 2015), this study involves examining startup branding by investigating



brand identity and positioning, brand promise and experience, the customer relationship and loyalty (Morgan-Thomas & Veloutsou, 2013; Rowley, 2009). The startup examined in this paper is Pegipegi, an online travel agent (OTA), which is rated as one of the top three such businesses in Indonesia (Redseer.com, 2019).

For this study, a case study research method was utilised. The primary and secondary data were collected from different sources. The secondary data were gathered from online and offline channels, while the primary data were collected through face-to-face interviews. The next section of this paper presents a literature review comprising a startups overview and consideration of branding theory. This is followed by explanation of the research methodology, presentation of the findings and discussion. Finally, a conclusion and research implications are delivered at the end of this paper.

Startups and Indonesian Startups

Startups are newly established firms looking for potential fruitful market segments in which to sell their products and grow their businesses (Pietro et al., 2017). The authors explained that the founder(s) usually comprise(s) one to three people determined to execute their idea to create change in the market with their limited own funding, and fairly close personal relationships. The business is influenced strongly by the founders in that they develop its basic structure (Rode & Vallaster, 2005). A startup's development period usually lasts for 3-5 years, in a business situation that is extremely uncertain, and the failure rates are high. In the early stages, whilst they tend to be self-funded, they may receive investment from angel investors or venture capital firms, which direct and support the startups in a number of ways (Hellmann & Puri, 2002). Recent studies put more emphasis on innovativeness, growth and unstable conditions in the marketplace as the characteristics of startups, rather than the time dimension (Rus et al., 2018; Ruzzier & Ruzzier, 2015).

A startup has several main characteristics. Firstly, it is a temporary organisation in the first phase of its life cycle, or it is embedded in an already existing corporate structure. Secondly, it is associated with a high degree of innovation, which addresses the target-oriented development of a product invention into an innovation along with the simultaneous development of a competitive and scalable business model. Thirdly, it pursues the objective of exceptional growth and fourthly, it runs its activities in an environment of extreme uncertainty. (Stock & Seliger, 2016) In brief, a startup has been described as being associated with innovation, growth, risk, uncertainty, and agility (Rus et al., 2018). Hence, not all new firms are startups.

A report by the Indonesian Creative Economy Agency stated that the number of startups was projected to grow by 20-30% in 2019 (The Jakarta Post, 2019). It was explained that several things are driving the growth of these startups, including the consumers' needs for digital solutions, the size of middle class population reaching 140 million people as well as the increasing number of people who are productive, literate in digital technology and see business opportunities through it. However, not many startups have succeeded, because of lack managerial expertise, lack of finance and technical factors. Nevertheless, an inability to meet customer needs is the main reason why startups fail (Winosa, 2019). For example, the success of Go-jek, a successful Indonesian startup, which provides ride hailing services nationally, has tempted others to set up me-too platform services dedicated to the local community. Moreover, startups mostly focus their efforts in product development and acquiring capital to grow, but not paying much attention to selling more products more or making them widely known to customers. In other words, startups tend to be unaware of the importance of branding in the early stages of their development.

Most Indonesian startups have been created to address the consumers' needs for digital solutions, which is supported by a very large number of internet users, i.e. 143.26 million people (Aryanto, 2018). It was reported that the number of online customers grew by 11.9% of the population comprising 31,535,000 people. In addition, e-commerce sales in Indonesia grew by 78% in 2018, the highest growth in the world, followed by Mexico (59%), the Philippines (51%), Colombia (45%), and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (33%) (Aryanto, 2018). A previous survey indicates that people who shop online in Indonesia include not only those who live in big cities, but increasingly people who live in small towns (Indonesia Internet Service Provider Association, 2018). The large number of internet users and online customers makes Indonesia attractive for e-commerce players, both foreign and local. A foreign entity, Rocket Internet GmbH, owns various online stores, such as Lazada, Zalora, FoodPanda, Lamido, Lamudi and Carmudi. Asian investors participating in the same business market place include JD.id, Qoo10, and Elevenia, while local businesses are Bukalapak, Tokopedia, Traveloka, Blibli, Ticket.com, Pegipegi, Ruang Guru, amongst many others. Recently, three startups - Tokopedia, Traveloka and Bukalapak - held the status of unicorns, while one startup, Go-jek, has the status of decacorn, which means it has a valuation of more than USD 10 billion (The Jakarta Post, 2019).



Brand identity and positioning

Brand identity refers to what managers want the brands to be (da Silveira et al., 2013). This includes the name, logo, graphic design, colour, shape, voice or music tone and a set of product and service features that are associated with the brand (de Chernatony & Christodoulides, 2004; Rowley, 2004a, 2004b). Moreover, brand identity is the only part of a brand that can be controlled by the company (Johansson & Carlson, 2015). Others argue that brand identity comprises uniqueness and/or ideas of a brand, value proposition as well as having tangible and intangible characteristics that are distinct from its competitors (Aaker, 1997; de Chernatony, 1999; Kapferer, 2008). It is argued that brand identity should be clear and consistent, so that it can serve as a clear, long lasting and stable reference for consumers (da Silveira et al., 2013; Kapferer, 2008). A brand must keep its identity, whilst persistently seeking to increase its relevance (Kapferer, 2008). In exceptional circumstances, such as in a dynamic environment, brand identity remains constant, but flexible, where the core values maintain consistency over time, with other dimensions adjustments to environmental changes (da Silveira et al., 2013). These authors also pointed out that consumers play an active role in the process of brand identity construction.

Brand positioning pertains to efforts to emphasise the distinctive characteristics of a certain brand that make it different from its competitors. It involves directing marketing activities and programmes; what the brand should and should not do (Keller & Lehman, 2006). The key aim of brand positioning is to establish a positive association in the minds of customers and other important characters or ideas to differentiate and strengthen the brand of its competitors. Brand positioning sets up customer expectations (Kapferer, 2008).

A communication strategy facilitates a firm in introducing its brand positioning (Kapferer, 2008). Keywords that are related to physical products, such as product design, are commonly used to build brand positioning through online channels. It is recommended to use specific keyword phrases, rather than a few short, broad terms in search engine marketing campaigns to gain more traffic and higher browser-to-customer conversion rates (Lim et al., 2010).

Brand promise and experience

Brand promise is the pledge made by the company to its customers before they make the purchase decision (Alwi & Ismail, 2013; Morrison & Crane, 2007). It is a source of brand differentiation and attracts customers to buy, therefore, it influences customer satisfaction and enhances customer loyalty (Morrison & Crane, 2007). Furthermore, an

e-brand or online brand refers to the company's promise to its consumer, and this promise can be related to product or brand or company reputation, and it is critical to the success of organisational performance (Balmer, 2010). In sum, a company's reputation is influenced by its credibility in delivering its promises (Alwi & Ismail, 2013).

Brand experience occurs because of interactions between customers, products, services and brands when they search, examine and evaluate all of these before and after product purchase (Grace & O'Cass, 2004; Hoch, 2002). Experiences can occur directly, when there is physical contact with products or a shop's actual environment/personnel, or indirectly, when customers are exposed to advertising and marketing communications through conventional and digital media or when they contact salespeople (Grace & O'Cass, 2004; Hoch & Ha, 1986). Customers reflect on a combination of direct and indirect experiences when they recall the brand (Hoch & Ha, 1986). Some brand experiences are stronger than others, whilst some are more positive or negative than others. Some occur spontaneously or slowly, are short lived or last longer, and they affect customer satisfaction and loyalty (Brakus et al., 2009). Brand reputation influences online brand experience in that it mitigates uncertainty and creates trust (Kollman & Suckow, 2008). Furthermore, brand reputation reduces the barriers to adopting new technology related to the digital environment and has an effect on the perceptions of self-efficacy (Morgan-Thomas & Veloutsou, 2013). Firms need to develop and keep their positive brand reputation. They need to use emotional base relationships with the customers, to deliver beyond the functional benefits of quality, product features or technical performance (ibid).

Customer relationship and loyalty

The technology development in digital media facilitates firms in developing and maintaining relationships with customers (Tzokas & Saren, 2004). Firms apply certain strategies to hold on to customer loyalty, such as direct communication, two-way dialogue, offering rewards, providing effective customer service and service recovery mechanisms and loyalty schemes. They may set up online brand communities; all of these means being very important in online brand building (Cuthbertson & Bridson, 2006; Rowley, 2009). Some provide detailed information about their goods in order to reduce perceived risk associated with online shopping, whilst multi-channel retailers apply a more convenient returns policy, such as "return to shop" to maintain the customer relationship and loyalty (Jang & Burns, 2004).



A low level of online or e-loyalty might be caused by unfulfilled brand promise or by customers not receiving the brand experiences that they have been promised (Alwi & Ismail, 2013). Customer loyalty in an online setting depends on consumer trust (Delgado-Ballester & Hernández-Espallardo, 2008; Harris & Goode, 2004) because there is no personal interaction (Danaher et al., 2003; Ibeh et al., 2005; Saini & Lynch, 2016) and the bond of trust in the electronic environment setting is very fragile (Varadarajan & Yadav, 2002).

Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature, involving a case study research method. The aim was to examine how a startup company develops and implements its branding strategy. It was set out to identify the key success factors of a startup company when developing its brand in Indonesia. The qualitative approach was conducted to explain the existing phenomena that will strengthen the existing research in startup branding.

A case study method was adopted as it could retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events, in this research, organisational and managerial processes (Yin, 2014). The data collection and analysis in case study research are guided by theoretical propositions. The method also relies on multiple sources of evidence, such that data can be converged in a triangulating fashion (Downward & Mearman, 2007; Yin, 2014). The data triangulation provides a "family of answers" that covers its reality in several contingent contexts, to capture a single, external and complex reality (Sobh & Perry, 2006, p.1203). In case study research, the distinction between field research and desk research is less important; what is important is the conversion of data into information and conclusions (Gummesson, 2000).

To select the case company, a list of the top 28 online companies in Indonesia was taken as a sampling frame (Cosseboom, 2015). The 28 online companies included online retail, travel, property, restaurant and automotive stores with different categories of online stores, namely online forum, business to business online store, customer to customer online store, business to customer online store and market place. From the sampling frame, online stores that were established before 2012 were excluded, leaving 11 for further enquiry. Of these, three agreed to become the samples of the study. However, only one online store, an OTA, Pegipegi, gave permission for face-to-face interviews. Specifically, the public relations and media manager of Pegipegi agreed to be interviewed.

Secondary data, including information from the OTA's website, online news, online advertisements (online advertorial, pop-up advertisement, and video advertisement), as well as advertisements through conventional channels (e.g. television, newspaper, billboard etc.) were gathered prior to the primary data collection. The primary data were collected through in-depth interviews. As abovementioned, these various sources of information were used in triangulation, as is common in qualitative research (Crescentini & Mainardi, 2009).

The in-depth interviews were face-to-face, and involved using prompting and probing techniques. Prompting was employed to obtain views and opinions from the respondents while probing was used to explore key issues that emerged during the interviews. Two interviews were conducted with the same respondent, in August 2017 and July 2019, because of the respondent's limited time availability. These interviews were recorded. Question guidelines were developed and sent before the interviews to enable the respondents to provide the information that was needed in response to the research questions (Crescentini & Mainardi, 2009). The topics of the questions raised in the interview included the company's target market, positioning, brand identity, brand promises, brand experience, marketing communication, and marketing loyalty. The interviews lasted for approximately 3.5 hours in total. After all the findings, both from the primary and secondary data, had been analysed and written up, the respondents were asked to confirm that the information presented was true and correct.

The results from the in-depth interviews were transcribed, coded and analysed using thematic analysis. This is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This analysis facilitates researchers to minimally organize and describe the data set in (rich) detail. All collected data were related to the theory, which was developed as the research framework.

Research Findings and Discussion

Pegipegi was established by three companies, namely (1) PT Alternative Media Group (AMG), an Indonesian media advertising company; (2) Recruit Holdings, a Japanese company for global online media and solutions; and (3) Altavindo, an Indonesian IT company. It was officially inaugurated on 7th May 2012 by the Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy, Mari Elka Pangestu, as an online travel agent (OTA). This OTA provides hotel reservations services to its customers. In August 2013, the company began selling domestic flight tickets to their customers. Since July 2015, it has provided free Android



apps, while in December 2015, an iOS free app was made available for customer convenience. In March 2016, it improved its services by adding train ticket reservations online.

In early 2017, Pegipegi gained full support from Recruit Holdings as its main investor (Hellmann & Puri, 2002). This Japanese firm has had experience in managing Jalan.net, a startup that has been transformed into one of the largest hotel and *ryokan* (lodging with Japanese architecture) booking sites in Japan. Pegipegi provides services for travel/business trips including accommodation, tourist attractions, events information and destination reviews from its members. The establishment of Pegipegi as a startup (Pietro et al., 2017; Rode & Vallaster, 2005) was inspired by Jalan.net. The support provided has been used to optimise services while improving hotel inventory as well as extending airline and train ticket coverage. Today, Pegipegi is a company that provides hotel, airline and train ticket reservations through websites, as well as through free applications on Android and iOS. The company is based in Jakarta, with it also having four representative offices in four main cities in Indonesia, i.e. Bandung, Yogyakarta, Surabaya and Denpasar. These strategy changes and innovation were implemented quickly to achieve the company's goal (Stock & Seliger, 2016) of being at the forefront in providing convenient OTA services.

Pegipegi focuses on addressing the needs of Indonesian business and leisure travellers. Currently, the company is directly linked to more than 25,000 hotels, starred and non-starred. It offers budget accommodation (mostly 2 and 3 stars hotels) in various tourist destinations in Indonesia, with the best rates and a bookings system for the same day of stay. In addition, Pegipegi has more than 25,000 daily, domestic and international flight routes, as well as booking services for train tickets covering over 2,800 routes. To ease the change of or cancellation of bookings, Pegipegi provides a variety of payment methods, including credit/debit card, internet banking and bank transfer through the ATM cash payment method in Indomaret - a very popular local minimarket chain. Its customer service can be reached by phone, email, website and social media, which include Line, and WhatsApp, for a 24 hour period.

Brand Identity and Positioning

As an OTA, Pegipegi wants to take advantage of Indonesia's numerous tourist destinations, such as mountains, forests, seas, beaches and even icebergs, where there is a rapidly growing market, due to the increasing demand by domestic tourists to visit those destinations. The majority of the demand comes from young travellers aged between 18 and 35 years old and belonging to socioeconomic

status B and C, according to Nielsen Indonesia (Kusumawardhani, 2017). Generally, they have a limited budget but want to explore the beauty of nature of Indonesia and upload interesting photos of their tour visits to the various social media they follow. This consumer behaviour helps the company in shaping brand identity creation (da Silveira et al., 2013).

Pegipegi wanted to become the first OTA in Indonesia that provides convenient services for the customers, and this has become the company's positioning in the industry (Keller & Lehman, 2006). This convenience service is represented by a vertically pointing fore-finger in its logo (Figure 1). The picture of a fore-finger conveys a message to customers to visit Pegipegi's website by clicking on it. The Public Relations and Media Manager said that "The fore-finger in the logo invites people to visit Pegipegi.....Just click, then you get Pegipegi services easily".

Figure 1. The logo before December 2017



Figure 2. The new logo



However, by 5th December 2017, Pegipegi announced its rebranding programme, launched its new logo and introduced Pevita Pearce, a young Indonesian actress, who has won many awards from various national film competitions. In the new logo, Pegipegi was no longer using the picture with a fore-finger (Figure 2). As one aspect of their brand identity (de Chernatony & Christodoulides, 2004; Rowley, 2004b, 2004a), the new Pegipegi's logo is considered to be more exciting, fresher, younger, more adventurous, happy and dynamic. This new logo that has been launched is a symbol of geo tags. In addition, the company uses fonts that are fresher and more cheerful. The tagline – "Now travelling is easy", which was presented in the previous logo, had been removed from the new one. Now Pegipegi puts more emphasis on being a "fun travelling partner", and this is the new tagline. Pevita Pearce was appointed as the brand ambassador, because she represents Pegipegi's vision, being a person who is fun, fresh, young, adventurous and happy. In this rebranding programme, the company maintains the identity as an OTA that provides convenience to the customers and sees this identity as appropriate



to changes in and demands of the business environment (da Silveira et al., 2013; Kapferer, 2008). At the beginning, the company portrayed customer convenience as a brand that made travel easy, "now travelling is easy". Then, this was changed to "fun travelling partner". Ryan Kartawidjaja, Pegipegi's Deputy CEO in a company press release (Nabila, 2017) explained:

We're rebranding our logo and vision. The point is to be a fun travelling partner providing information on top destinations. Unlike other players, we want to provide information about travelling in Indonesia... our goal is to make travellers obtain information easier. Furthermore, Pegipegi will strengthen the customer service team.

The greatest numbers of customers of Pegipegi come from people who live in the Greater Jakarta area, who are very familiar with online purchasing. The biggest age group who buy Pegipegi's services are those ranging from 20 to 25 years. This OTA prioritises its customer's convenience by providing around the clock services through telephone and email. The phone service is available for customers, who are reluctant to buy the services through websites or applications, usually being those who are over 35 years old. The competitors of this OTA in the industry include Traveloka, Tiket.com, Nusatrip, Ezytravel, Airpaz and Mister Aladin. Traveloka is the market leader in the industry (Redseer.com, 2019).

The difference between Pegipegi and its competitors is in its tourist information, which has become the company's brand identity (de Chernatony & Christodoulides, 2004; Kapferer, 2008). In general, OTAs provide ticket reservation and accommodation services only, but Pegipegi offers additional features, namely travelling tips and reviews, thus giving customers useful information before they book and pay for their tickets and hotels. There are more than 7,500 articles on travel tips available, which consist of lots of information about travel preparation (e.g. how to get a passport, visa, etc.), various activities being suggested whilst travelling, including favourite and recommended places to visit, culinary tours and festivals along with promotions. The webpage has been designed to facilitate interactive communication, where customers can read, review and give comments on many tourist destination articles, both before and after their trip. There are more than 1,160 domestic tourist destinations, most of which being domestic destinations that have not been explored much. In addition, it also provides 130 international destinations, which are mostly located nearby (e.g. ASEAN countries, Korea, Japan, or places that become trending topics on social media). The availability of this tourist information is intended to increase traffic and visitors to Pegipegi's website. Moreover, it helps to achieve the mission of

Pegipegi, that of increasing the number of young local tourist customers in Indonesia visiting and exploring domestic destinations in an easy and convenient way, by using its services. All of these strategies and programmes have been carried out and adjusted to show and support the positioning of a brand (Pegipegi), such that it has a different character to those of competitors (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020). The Public Relations and Media Manager of this OTA said:

With convenience and advancement available in this country, travelling should be easier, which is in accordance with our tagline, "now travelling is easy". Besides, we also want to be a "fun travelling partner"...For this reason, we carry out various strategies to attract our target markets.

Brand Promise and Experience

As explained earlier, the main requirement for Pegipegi's customers is convenience. The intended customer convenience covers a variety of things, as explained by Pegipegi's public relation and media manager:

What is needed by the people of Indonesia? Indonesians want to have convenience. They do not want to get stuck in traffic. They want to get to the destination quickly and safely. They want to get the service easily, and they want lower or discounted prices.

Pegipegi focuses on meeting their customer needs. As aforementioned, it communicates its offers through advertisements in various media (Kapferer, 2008), so that a wide range of customers know the services promised by this OTA (Alwi & Ismail, 2013; Morrison & Crane, 2007). The main message delivered is focused on customer convenience if people use Pegipegi as their travelling partner. This is in line with its taglines, "now travelling is easy" and "fun travelling partner". Pegipegi helps customers to book train/plane tickets and hotels, hence travelling is easy for them. Moreover, customers feel it is convenient because they have been assisted by this OTA as a fun travelling partner. To become such a partner, Pegipegi has been supported by its partners, namely airlines, trains, hotels, banking and insurance firms. According to Rao et al. (1999), this type of arrangement is a brand alliance strategy, where two or more brands coexist as a whole entity to consumers. The alliance is implemented to fulfil the brand promise and brand experience of Pegipegi. In an interview (Angriyana, 2017), the deputy CEO, Ryan Kartawidjaja said, "Our vision is to become a fun travelling partner for all Indonesians. We have two main focuses, namely customer experience and customer satisfaction."



To meet the needs of their customers, Pegipegi quickly provided applications that could be downloaded for free. Then, they developed features that were highly user friendly, so that new customers, who their site can easily make orders and payments (Rachman, 2017). They have also prioritised customer convenience when they make reservations. Furthermore, the application helps Pegipegi's customers to plan their travel carefully, thereby maximising their satisfaction. In addition, they changed their appearance, user interface (UI) and user experience (UX), of the application and mobile website to become more interactive and stress-free for users, thus improving customers' brand experience (Grace & O'Cass, 2004; Hoch, 2002). It is important for Pegipegi that satisfied customers will inspire others to use the company's offerings, as product or service, through positive electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) or reviews (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004) get higher recommendations to others compared to products or service with negative e-WOM (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017; Lee & Youn, 2009).

To provide customer convenience, Pegipegi has continuously increased its inventory in terms of increasing the number of hotels, schedules and routes of flights and trains. Previous studies have shown that product or service availability affects consumer intention to buy various products or services (Fotopoulos & Krystallis, 2002; Gaur et al., 2015). In addition, they offer a variety of themed packages, such as trips for conferences, sports events and honeymoon. These packages are designed by choosing various events that have been scheduled each year, for example, sports competitions, such as the 2018 Asian Games. Regarding this event, Pegipegi offered special packages, so that both tickets and accommodation were bought at special rates. Evlin Winter in Pegipegi's press release in December 2017 said:

For some people, planning a trip is unpleasant and troublesome. Pegipegi is a fun travelling partner, facilitating people to plan their trip through easy-to-use applications and providing information about interesting destinations in Indonesia available in several communication platforms, such as social media, the Pegipegi magazine and travel blog. (Pegipegi.com, 2017)

Pegipegi has a feature that helps customers to find a hotel through an index, which gives the names in alphabetical order and the city (area). Thus, a customer can easily find a hotel in a certain destination through this facility on the website and application. Hotel searching can also be done through search engines... This is the strength of Pegipegi because we get feedback from customers who say that they have experience in searching for cheap hotels in certain areas, by typing, for example, cheap hotels in Tanah Abang. It turns out that

Pegipegi's website is displayed on the top row or in the top few lines of the searching results. (Public Relations and Media Manager)

To improve the search findings based on keywords using search engine marketing (Lim et al., 2010), Pegipegi collaborates with e-marketing blogs, by inviting bloggers to become the company's affiliates who promote this OTA. They have also appointed a Blogger Ambassador.

Customers who are interested in exploring various tourist destinations can easily use the facilities on the website and application of this OTA. They just click on the destination they want to know on the "Explore Indonesia" page, which is grouped based on the larger islands in Indonesia, i.e. Jawa, Sumatra, Sulawesi, Kalimantan, Bali, Nusa Tenggara, Maluku and Papua. There are various types of tours that can be explored, including nature, culture, culinary and adventure/creation for each island group. Customers can search and select the destinations they want, and how to get there, then learn it through articles or reviews. Hence, before customers go on their journey, they can get complete information and travel tips, such as cheap lodgings, what activities there are, as well as where to go during a particular season, or what to prepare when travelling with young children. Pegipegi educates the customers to plan their trips to make them enjoyable. To encourage them to purchase, it provides them with direct access to book their lodgings as well as the travelling tickets (flights or train) on the travel tips page that is being learned by them.

Customer relationship and loyalty

In addition to promotions and a customer relationship, Pegipegi provides various loyalty schemes (Cuthbertson & Bridson, 2006), such as reward points, which is called Pepe Point. The points are given to customers - members of Pegipegi. They are earned by the customers and can be used to purchase hotel reservations with the company. Moreover, this OTA also gives cashback, which is stored in customer accounts. To improve customer satisfaction and ensure good customer relations, Pegipegi provides services for customer complaints as well as changing and cancellation of ticket and hotel reservations, which can be done directly through telephone or email to the customer service team.

To support their services to end-users, Pegipegi has a sales team that maintains good relationships with the hotels that have joined the company. According to previous studies, the goal of such a relationship is business growth for both the company and vendors (Visentin & Scarpi, 2012; Wagner & Benoit née Moeller, 2014). In this



relationship, the company provides applications for the hotels to maintain the service quality. This application provides various tips and training materials followed by the owner or manager of the hotels, to maintain their quality. In addition to managing the quality of services, customers are provided with an online channel to assess the lodging services they use, so that customers, lodges (hotels) and Pegipegi can maintain the service quality. The current sales coming from their loyal customers are 50%, while the rest are new customers.

Marketing Communication

To increase their sales, Pegipegi implements sales promotions through various programmes during national holidays. For example, the “*Mudik Bareng Pegipegi*” [“Going Home with Pegipegi”] campaign is always held every year before Eid Al-Fitr. Pegipegi collaborates with at least five national banks for the campaign. Customers who order through this campaign will get special offers from its official merchandising partners, such as Books & Beyond, Share Tea, Karei-ya Fusion, Dante Coffee, Wranglers, Tira jeans, Colorbox, The Executive, and The Peak Resort Dining & Connoisseurs. With these special offers, customers can get special prices when they shop at those official partners. In addition, Pegipegi provides culinary places and lodging information along the homecoming route at special prices. This helps customers who need food and accommodation during their trip, as long traffic jams usually occur during Eid Al-Fitr homecoming trips. A similar campaign, which is called “*Hoki Promo*” [“Lucky Promotion”] is run during the Chinese new year holiday. This has been created to help people who are travelling during the Chinese New Year holiday to get the best prices.

Pegipegi launched a programme called “*WIDIH (wiken 35% diskon hotel)*” [35% hotel discount during the weekend] to increase the use of the application. The promotion is carried out to help customers get the best prices during weekends, with discounts of up to 35%, especially for hotel bookings on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, and to stay on weekends. As Ryan Kartawidjaja, Deputy CEO of Pegipegi, said in a press release (Dinisari, 2017a), the “Weekend is the most popular time for travelling. However, many hotels set high prices at the weekend. In response to this, Pegipegi presents the WIDIH programme, so that travellers get the best price.”

In addition to the WIDIH promos, Pegipegi has regular sales promotion each week, which is called “Promo of the Week” and offers discounts of up to 50%, when customers pay with debit or credit cards issued by certain banks; the business partners of Pegipegi. As stated by (Walchli, 2007), joint promotion is co-branding, in which two or more brands jointly conduct sales promotion programmes to improve the value of

co-branded products or services (Washburn et al., 2004) or to achieve certain marketing goals (Varadarajan, 1985). Customers will get special prices when they pay for the services via Pegipegi's banking partners. Furthermore, Pegipegi implemented sales promotion to Pokemon Go fans in August 2016. When the public was hit by Pokemon Go fever, Pegipegi provided special offers for customers who were searching for their favourite monsters. For this promotion, Pegipegi gave discounts up to 25% to consumers who were on its hotel listings. Customers were asked to send their screen captures of their activities when they were playing Pokemon Go and sharing the pictures on the social media they were following. The pictures were sent to Pegipegi's customer service via email, cs@pegipegi.com, with the email title #pegipegiMainPokemonGo and included the screen capture posting link, which was published on their social media.

In addition to sales promotions, as aforementioned, Pegipegi presents advertisements through on online and offline channels. In each of its advertisements, it emphasises the ease of flight, train and hotel reservations through its website and application. Some of these messages are conveyed through ad jingles that are very good at getting the viewer's attention and easy to remember. Pegipegi collaborates with a very well-known Indonesian rock band, Gigi, to sing the ad jingles. The lyrics of the song talk about the benefit of using Pegipegi services. At the end of its every advertisement, a unique end-tune "Pegipegi yuk" ["Let's take a trip"] is played. The music and end-tune are intended to get customers to remember the brand easier, increase public awareness, and to invite people to use the company's services (Lantos & Craton, 2012).

Pegipegi has delivered at least three different formats of advertisements every year, which are both delivered through social media, and TV. Once, it also used cars as its advertising media. Another advertising message delivered is the provision of travel insurance that provides complete protection, easy processing and fast claims. Television is still used by Pegipegi to reach customers outside Jabodetabek (Greater Jakarta). The ads on television were intended to increase awareness of people outside Jabodetabek that is still considered low. It was reported that television advertising spending by digital base firms was greater compared to that spent by companies in other industries, for example, conventional retailers (Jatikusumo, 2019). It was found that Pegipegi's advertising costs in television are relatively low compared to its competitors. In 2016, Traveloka, as the market leader, spent more than 24 million US dollars in advertising costs, Trivago spent 8 million US dollars, and Mister Aladin spent 6.9 million US dollar, whilst Pegipegi spent just 860,000 US dollars



(Hasan, 2016). In 2017, OTAs ad expenditures were as follows: Traveloka, 56.8 million US dollars, Mister Aladin, more than 7.5 million US dollars, Tiket.com more than 2.8 million US dollars, and Pegipegi almost 2.8 million US dollars (Phinemo.com, 2018). In 2018, Traveloka spent 30.658 million US dollars, followed by Tiket.com, which spent 20.7 million US dollars and Mister Aladin, which spent 20 million US dollars in 2018 (Movanita, 2018). In 2019, Traveloka as the market leader was still in the first position in advertising, spending for 31.5 million US dollars, followed by Mister Aladin at 28.64 million US dollar (Jatikusumo, 2019). The amount of advertising costs incurred in 2018 and 2019 by Pegipegi has not been disclosed to the public (Jatikusumo, 2019; Movanita, 2018).

Pegipegi Performance

The addition of train ticket services and partnerships with tens to thousands of hotel service providers boosted the growth of Pegipegi's transaction value in January-November 2017. "Compared to 2016, the growth of transaction value in Pegipegi is more than 200%," said Ryan Kartawijaya, Deputy CEO of Pegipegi (Rachman, 2017). This increase in its sales transactions was contributed by user transactions through Pegipegi's applications and mobile websites, amounting to 70% -80% of the total transaction value. That number doubled from 2016, which only reached 40%. The highest contribution came from hotel rooms, followed by flight and train ticket bookings. Pegipegi's application users also continue to grow, with the number being more than 2 million by mid-2017 (Tempo.co, 2017). Jakarta, Bandung, Yogyakarta, Surabaya and Bali are the most popular destinations searched by Pegipegi users.

Pegipegi's existence is increasingly accepted by the community through its achievement in user satisfaction. Through this, the OTA has received various awards for several categories, including the best brand choice, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. Pegipegi achieved two awards in 2017 (Dinisari, 2017b). First, Bronze Champion for Online Travel Agent category, awarded at Indonesia WOW Brand 2017 by MarkPlus, Inc., a leading Indonesian marketing consultant. This award was given to the successful brand leaders for increasing the advocacy for their products in the previous year. Second, there was the Netizen Online Reservation Choice, awarded at Netizen Brand Choice Awards (NBCA) for 2017. This appreciation award was given to the best companies in each category that have had the biggest influence on the development of marketing strategies on social media. In the following year, Pegipegi received Silver Champion for the same award given at Indonesia WOW Brand 2018 (Dinisari, 2018). In 2019, the company won the Best Service Quality

Award from *Carre, Center for Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty*, an integrated customer satisfaction and service quality consulting firm (Dinisari, 2019).

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine the branding strategy of a digital technology based startup in OTA, Pegipegi with a focus on the brand identity and positioning, the brand promise and experience as well as customer relationship and loyalty. The company has several characteristics of a startup (Rode & Vallaster, 2005; Stock & Seliger, 2016). Firstly, at the beginning of its formation, Pegipegi used its own funds and involved limited parties from each company to run the business. Secondly, they wanted to develop the business quickly and dominate the OTA market. This was reflected by the company's efforts at building a business that began as hotel reservation services. In the following year, it added flight ticket booking services, and train ticket reservations. Within three years after initiation, it provided a free service application to increase customer convenience for shopping online. Thirdly, the business started when the challenges in the online business were very significant, whereby both customers and suppliers of services, such as hotels and flight services, did not trust it. However, as the company's website traffic progressed, these hotels and airlines trusted them to be their marketing channel.

The results indicate that as a brand of a startup, Pegipegi has been developed through similar branding principles, such as brand identity and positioning, brand promise and experience, customer relationship and loyalty strategies (Morgan-Thomas & Veloutsou, 2013; Rowley, 2009). Pegipegi's brand development process was started by developing the company's identity (da Silveira et al., 2013) as an OTA focusing on Indonesia's domestic tourism destinations. It has positioned (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020) itself as a brand that offers travelling convenience for young Indonesian travellers, who want to enjoy the beauty of Indonesia with a limited budget. Pegipegi decided to undertake a rebranding strategy and made changes to the logo and tagline to reflect the changes in the business environment (da Silveira et al., 2013; Kapferer, 2008). As a new brand, Pegipegi has communicated its positioning, brand promises and experience through advertisements on online media, such as social media, search engines and offline media (Alwi & Ismail, 2013; Kapferer, 2008; Lim et al., 2010; Morrison & Crane, 2007). To attract and retain its customers, the company has implemented various loyalty programmes (Cuthbertson & Bridson, 2006).

Besides, the research findings of this study indicate that there are other strategies carried out by the company other than those



identified in previous studies. In order to maintain their brand promise and experience, the company has applied strategic alliances (Rao et al., 1999) with various companies that have a good image in the community, such as well-known banking, airlines and hotel enterprises. They have also improved their interactivity with their customers through a user-friendly website and an application (Grace & O'Cass, 2004; Hoch, 2002). The product and service policy in terms of availability is a major concern of the company aimed at maintaining consumer purchase intention (Fotopoulos & Krystallis, 2002; Gaur et al., 2015). Customers who are satisfied and express their satisfaction with the service and provide positive recommendation(s) are very important for the company to influence others' decisions to purchase its services (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). To increase customer trust, which is fragile in the digital based industry (Varadarajan & Yadav, 2002), the company has implemented a co-branding strategy by involving brands that are well known to the public (Walchli, 2007; Washburn et al., 2004). Furthermore, a co-branding strategy of an ad jingle and a typical end-tune, which are unique and typical of millennials have been created to help marketing aimed at improving brand awareness, brand recall and increasing visitor traffic using the company's services (Lantos & Craton, 2012). In addition to the strategies aimed at increasing the sales, the company strives hard to maintain relationships with their suppliers and vendors, namely hotels and transportation companies, so that together they will achieve business growth (Visentin & Scarpi, 2012; Wagner & Benoit née Moeller, 2014).

Our findings are in line with previous studies on the importance of building a brand, with no exceptions for startups, right from the early phase of their establishment. A startup that selects and builds its target market as well as positioning the brand correctly will attract the attention in its target market easily, as Pegipegi has done with young people who love to travel. Young travellers usually choose cheaper travel services, suiting to their income. This could lead to OTAs to falling into a price war, which would result in high cost. The cost of brand building can be reduced through creative marketing programmes, for example, the use of positive e-WOM. This is very effective in increasing customer trust, attracting the attention of new customers to visit the website and downloading the application, and finally, buying the services offered. Media selection for marketing communication is also important. The use of social media, which is very common for young travellers, is highly recommended because it is more effective. Furthermore, good collaboration with service suppliers is important for maintaining and improving customer satisfaction, because a service provider, such as an OTA, is

dependent on services provided by hotels and transportation firms. Furthermore, satisfied customers will usually share their experiences through popular social media that they and their networks use. In return, this will have a positive impact on the business growth of the OTA and its suppliers.

This research is limited to an OTA startup, with startups in other industries such as fashion, electronics, properties, food, transport and so on, also developing fast in countries like Indonesia. Unfortunately, these companies did not provide positive responses to requests to participate during the study. Therefore, challenges to obtain more insights in startup branding in digital base industry, are bigger. Further research should investigate how these startups build their marketing communications in the early stages of their establishment to survive and grow their business, even eventually surpassing conventional counterparts in various industries.

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