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SUSTAINING GROWTH THROUGH CROSS-DISCIPLINARY INNOVATION: A SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS ANALYSIS OF KOPI KENANGAN (KENANGAN BRANDS) TOWARD LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY

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Abstract

This study analyzes the cross-disciplinary innovation journey of Kopi Kenangan (Kenangan Brands), Indonesia's first new retail F&B unicorn, from its founding in 2017 through its regional expansion in 2022–2024. The research examines how the company integrates product, process, business model, and digital innovations while sustaining competitive advantage in a rapidly evolving market. Using a combination of Schumpeterian innovation theory, business model frameworks (Osterwalder & Pigneur), digital platform theory, absorptive capacity (Cohen & Levinthal), and service ecosystem theory (Norman & Ramirez), this paper systematically maps Kopi Kenangan's innovation dimensions. Triple Helix and Penta Helix frameworks are applied to assess its stakeholder ecosystem, and Critical Management Studies (CMS) perspectives are employed to interrogate social, cultural, and environmental consequences of its growth model. Findings reveal that Kopi Kenangan's competitive strength derives from local taste differentiation, omnichannel integration, ERP/SAP-powered operations, and digital loyalty platforms. However, sustaining this growth ethically requires deeper academic collaboration, verified sustainability metrics, fair labor practices, and culturally adaptive internationalization. Strategic recommendations are provided to support Kopi Kenangan's transition from a growth-first to a growth-plus-sustainability model.

Keywords: Cross-Disciplinary Innovation, Sustainable Business, Digital Platform, Coffee Industry, Helix Framework, Critical Management Studies.

INTRODUCTION

Kopi Kenangan, now operating under the Kenangan Brands umbrella, presents a compelling case of cross-disciplinary innovation within Indonesia's fast-moving consumer goods sector. Since its founding in 2017, the company has grown rapidly to become one of the largest on-the-go coffee chains in Indonesia, combining physical retail outlets with digital channels (application and delivery services) while introducing ready-to-drink (RTD) products and food sub-brands. This trajectory was achieved not through product expansion alone, but through a deliberate integration of digitalization, service ecosystem design, and marketing strategies that are highly responsive to modern consumer behavior (Wibisono, 2022).

In the context of its business model, Kopi Kenangan has successfully integrated franchise and direct-ownership outlet operations, balancing operational flexibility with strict quality control. The company leverages data analytics to understand consumer preferences, optimize its supply chain, and dynamically adjust pricing strategies. From an innovation helix perspective, Kopi Kenangan interacts with a diverse range of stakeholders—including government bodies, universities, investors, and local communities—creating an innovation ecosystem that supports new product development and sustainable practices. This multi-actor engagement allows the company to combine technological, social, and business innovations within a unified strategic framework.

Furthermore, regional expansion and sustainability efforts undertaken during 2022–2024 affirm that Kopi Kenangan pursues not only quantitative growth but also attends to social and environmental

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impact. Initiatives such as eco-friendly packaging, collaboration with local farmers, and the corporate social responsibility program 'Kenangan BAIK' strengthen brand image while adding value to local communities. A critical reflection on these strategies reveals that despite the operational and financial risks posed by rapid expansion, an innovation-driven, digitalized, and cross-helix collaborative approach helps the company sustain its competitive edge. This analysis provides important strategic insights for other startups navigating rapid growth, continuous innovation, and complex market ecosystems (Wibisono, 2022).

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Innovation Theory: Classical and Contemporary

The analysis of Kopi Kenangan is best situated within a combination of theoretical lenses: Schumpeterian innovation (product and process), business model theory (Osterwalder & Pigneur), digital/platform innovation (Evans, Parker, Van Alstyne), absorptive capacity (Cohen & Levinthal), and service/ecosystem theory (Norman & Ramirez). Schumpeter's emphasis on 'new combinations' is evident in Kopi Kenangan's formulation of locally flavored beverages (coffee with palm sugar and emotional branding) combined with lower-cost production and distribution processes (small outlets, efficient operations). Process innovations that reduce cost-per-cup support scalability, as evidenced by the launch of RTD products and the grab-and-go outlet format that minimizes physical footprint (Kenangan Brands, 2022).

2.2 Business Model Innovation

The business model innovation framework (Osterwalder & Pigneur) shows that Kopi Kenangan recombines elements such as value proposition (quality coffee at affordable prices with digital convenience), channels (app, delivery, outlets), customer segments (urban millennials), revenue streams (outlets, app, RTD), and cost structure (small/hybrid outlets). For example, the company launched the RTD product 'Kopi Kenangan Hanya Untukmu' in January 2022 (Laras, 2023). The transformation toward 'new retail' and omnichannel (online-offline) sales channels signals a shift in the business model toward a digital/retail hybrid.

2.3 Digital Platform Innovation and Absorptive Capacity

Platform theory emphasizes data, network effects, and scale. Kopi Kenangan leverages its application, consumer behavioral data, and delivery integration to increase conversion and retention. The migration to ERP/SAP solutions (RISE with SAP via IBM) represents an effort to strengthen back-end capabilities to support digital scale. This reflects the organization's absorptive capacity—the ability to absorb external technology and modify internal processes accordingly (IBM Asean Newsroom, 2023).

2.4 Service Ecosystem Theory

Norman and Ramirez emphasize the importance of service systems; Kopi Kenangan is not merely selling coffee but delivering an experience encompassing digital loyalty, brand connectivity, and a brand portfolio. The expansion into Chigo (chicken), Cerita Roti, and RTD demonstrates a strategy of developing an F&B ecosystem that maximizes distribution assets and digital channels (Kenangan Brands, 2024).

2.5 Helix Frameworks: Triple Helix and Penta Helix

The Triple Helix model conceptualizes innovation as the product of interaction among industry, university, and government. The Penta Helix extends this by incorporating civil society (community/environment) and media/culture as additional innovation actors. Applied to Kopi Kenangan, the Triple Helix reveals strong industry-government linkages, while university collaboration remains

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underdeveloped—representing a strategic gap and opportunity for applied research cooperation (Ardiansyah, 2023; Fitri, 2023).

2.6 Critical Management Studies (CMS)

Critical Management Studies positions organizations not merely as economic entities, but as arenas of power, ideology, and complex social relations. CMS questions the foundational assumptions of mainstream management efficiency, productivity, innovation, growth—by asking who benefits, who bears costs, and how business practices affect social structures, labor, and ecology. In the context of Kopi Kenangan, CMS analysis is essential given the company's rapid growth, reliance on digital technology, and operation within a highly competitive urban ecosystem that is prone to social issues not visible in conventional management analysis.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative case study methodology using document analysis and systematic literature review. The primary case is Kopi Kenangan / Kenangan Brands, selected for its pioneering status as a new retail unicorn and the richness of available documentation in corporate communications, journalistic coverage, and academic literature. Data sources include corporate press releases, CSR annual reports, industry analyses from World Coffee Portal, technology partnership announcements (IBM, SAP), Indonesian and international business journalism, and peer-reviewed academic articles published between 2020 and 2025.

Theoretical triangulation is employed by applying multiple innovation frameworks to the same empirical case: Schumpeterian theory, business model innovation, platform theory, absorptive capacity, service ecosystem theory, Triple and Penta Helix models, and CMS. This multi-framework approach enables a more comprehensive and balanced analysis than any single theoretical lens would afford. Data analysis proceeds through thematic mapping of documentary evidence against the theoretical frameworks, followed by synthesis into evidence-based strategic recommendations.

The limitations of this study include reliance on publicly available data, which may underrepresent internal operational challenges. As a single case study, generalizability is bounded, though findings offer transferable insights for similar high-growth F&B startups in emerging markets. The study period covers 2017 to 2024, with primary analytical focus on the post-unicorn phase (2022–2024) when internationalization and sustainability concerns became most prominent.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Company Profile and Recent Developments

Kopi Kenangan was founded in 2017 and grew rapidly into one of Indonesia's largest on-the-go coffee chains, combining physical outlets with digital channels (application and delivery) while introducing RTD products and food sub-brands under Kenangan Brands. Following the major Series C funding of US$96 million in late 2021, the company pursued aggressive expansion across many Indonesian cities and began expanding into Southeast Asian markets such as Malaysia and Singapore in 2023–2024. Corporate reports and industry coverage document hundreds to nearly a thousand outlets, alongside a focus on digital transformation (ERP/SAP implementation in partnership with IBM) and the CSR program 'Kenangan BAIK' (Wibisono, 2022).

The main challenges identified from organizational developments and market dynamics include: (a) maintaining quality amidst rapid expansion, ensuring consistency of taste, service, and customer

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experience as the number of outlets grows significantly (Kenangan Brands, 2024); (b) optimizing omni-channel retail operations, integrating front-end (app, delivery, outlets) and back-end (inventory, ERP, logistics) so that scale does not erode margins (IBM Asean Newsroom, 2023); (c) sustaining differentiation in a competitive market, preserving a unique position (local-flavored coffee + affordable pricing + convenience) amid competition from local and international players (World Coffee Portal, 2024); (d) achieving social and environmental legitimacy through supply chain responsibility toward farmers, environmental footprint management, and transparent CSR so the brand is not perceived as pursuing growth at any cost (Kenangan Brands, 2023); and (e) adapting cross-culturally for regional expansion—localizing products and operations to be relevant in other countries without losing brand identity (World Coffee Portal, 2024).

4.2 Innovation Strategy Analysis

Kopi Kenangan employs product differentiation through local flavor innovation (e.g., 'Kenangan Mantan') and emotional brand positioning as its core brand weapon. The launch of the RTD product 'Kopi Kenangan Hanya Untukmu' in January 2022 extended distribution to modern retail outlets, enlarging the market and reducing dependence on outlet transactions alone. This product innovation strategy strengthens differentiation and broadens market reach (Kenangan Brands, 2022).

The small-footprint outlet model and standardized SOPs enable the opening of many outlets at relatively controlled capital costs. Combined with the ERP/SAP system (IBM), this approach aims to strengthen supply chain visibility, inventory planning, and outlet performance monitoring to maintain margins as scale increases. Success depends on the quality of technology implementation and staff training (IBM Asean Newsroom, 2023). The multi-brand model (new retail, RTD, and brand portfolio expansion) helps fulfill complementary consumer needs (coffee and light/main meals) while maximizing outlet traffic and serving as a risk diversification strategy (Kenangan Brands, 2024).

Digitalization is not merely a sales channel but a source of consumer insight. With a significant proportion of digital sales, customer data can be used for personalization, stock optimization, and loyalty campaigns. Technology partnerships (IBM + SAP) indicate serious investment to maintain operational agility at large scale (IBM Asean Newsroom, 2023). Research from 2024 confirms that Kopi Kenangan's digital innovations significantly influence consumer loyalty (Larasati et al., 2025). The CSR program 'Kenangan BAIK' signals sustainability orientation; however, the challenge is to ensure that CSR programs produce measurable impact—such as farmer welfare and carbon footprint reduction—rather than mere reputational campaigns. Making sustainability part of the value proposition requires clear metrics and transparency (Kenangan Brands, 2023).

Expansion to Malaysia, Singapore, and plans for other markets demonstrate international ambition. Success in foreign markets requires product adaptation, understanding of local regulations, and cross-border supply chain capabilities. Early data show strong growth in the Malaysian market (2024), though long-term scenarios require careful localization strategies (World Coffee Portal, 2024). Strategically, the combination of local products and competitive pricing, strong digital channels, and an efficient operational model have delivered growth speed and scale. Vulnerabilities include quality degradation risk, worker pressure, high investor expectations, and potential criticism regarding supply chain ethics and sustainability.

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4.3 Helix Ecosystem Analysis

Within the Triple Helix framework, Kopi Kenangan serves as the industry actor and primary innovation initiator. The government supports the startup ecosystem, retail regulation, and creative economy export promotion; Kopi Kenangan interacts with policies that facilitate digital and retail expansion (Fitri, 2023). Formal collaboration with universities is not yet publicly dominant; most related research examines Kopi Kenangan's consumer behavior and marketing rather than technical collaboration. This reveals a strategic gap: opportunities for applied research cooperation (coffee varieties, agronomy, sustainable supply chains, operational technology) that could strengthen long-term innovation (Ardiansyah, 2023).

The Penta Helix analysis reveals a relatively complete actor ecosystem. Consumer and community engagement is facilitated through the digital application and emotional branding ('Kopi Kenangan Mantan'). Media and cultural actors are leveraged through social media, application platforms, and influencer marketing to drive penetration of the contemporary coffee culture. Community and environmental actors are addressed through the 'Kenangan BAIK' CSR program covering farmer empowerment, coffee waste recycling, and environmental campaigns (Kenangan Brands, 2023). Investor and financial actors are represented through major venture capital participation and technology partnerships (IBM/SAP). Kopi Kenangan's helix ecosystem is strong on the industry-investor-media axes, but relatively weak in structured academic collaboration an opportunity that, if developed, could yield dividends in social legitimacy, product and supply chain research, and credible sustainability solutions.

4.4 Critical Management Studies Perspectives

The grab-and-go and digital ordering model increases operational efficiency but restructures outlet work: jobs become more measurable, target-driven, and subject to heightened performance pressure. Without robust welfare policies, rapid retail expansion risks producing the labor condition challenges documented across the global F&B sector. Ensuring worker welfare must be part of an ethical innovation strategy. Similarly, the CSR program 'Kenangan BAIK' signals sustainability orientation, but CMS frameworks require distinguishing substantive commitment measurable impacts, supply chain audits, certified farmer welfare from reputational positioning (Kenangan Brands, 2023).

CONCLUSION

Kopi Kenangan represents a compelling example of cross-disciplinary innovation that integrates local products, operational efficiency, a hybrid business model, and digitalization to generate rapid growth and open new market opportunities. The company demonstrates a sophisticated synthesis of multiple innovation dimensions product differentiation, process standardization, business model transformation, digital platform development, and service ecosystem co-creation. The Penta Helix ecosystem is relatively mature on the industry-investor-media axes, though university collaboration represents a persistent strategic gap.

However, for this innovation to be sustainable and ethical, the company must strengthen research collaboration, make sustainability measurable, maintain operational quality, empower its workforce, and localize international expansion. Through the lens of innovation theory (product/process, business model, digital, ecosystem) and helix frameworks (Triple and Penta), Kopi Kenangan has integrated many innovation dimensions. Yet from a critical perspective, challenges remain regarding operational quality, worker pressures, data ethics, and social/environmental sustainability. The transition from unicorn to

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sustainable enterprise requires institutionalizing accountability mechanisms across all stakeholder relationships.

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