

## Startup strategies in building brand awareness (Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis of Korean drama Start-Up)

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### ABSTRACT

Digital technology development has driven the rapid growth of startups in Indonesia. In increasingly fierce competition, brand awareness strategies are key to strengthening identity and attracting the attention of the public and investors. One way to understand and inspire this strategy is through the analysis of representations in popular media, such as Korean dramas, which have broad appeal and influence. This study aims to analyze Samsan Tech's brand awareness strategy in Start-Up dramas using the Attention, Interest, Desire, Action (AIDA) model, as well as examine its symbolic meaning through Roland Barthes' semiotics. This study uses a qualitative approach with content analysis and semiotics methods to explore the meaning of denotative, connotative, and mythical. Data were collected through observation and scene documentation featuring brand awareness strategies, and supported by literature reviews related to AIDA models and startup communication strategies. The results show that Samsan Tech applied the AIDA model by attracting attention through competition, building interest through product presentations, creating desires through relationships with public figures and business projections, and encouraging action through cooperation with large investors. Barthes' analysis reveals symbolic meanings, such as entrepreneurial spirit, team collaboration, and the struggle to face business challenges. This study shows that popular dramas can represent an inspiring business strategy and shape the public perception of startups.

**Keywords:** Startups, Brand awareness, AIDA model, Roland Barthes semiotics, Korean drama

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RESEARCH & PUBLISHING



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology in the current industrial age has brought about important changes in various sectors (Fatimah & Irwansyah, 2020), including the economy. One of the standards of economic progress in Indonesia is the increasing number of startups focusing on technological innovation to provide solutions to various societal problems (Tarihoran et al., 2021). Based on data from the Startup Ranking 2025, Indonesia is ranked 6th among the countries with the highest number of startups in the world, followed by the United States, India, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia. Currently, there are 2989 registered startups in Indonesia (Startupranking, 2025). This increase shows that startups are growing and have great potential for improving the national economy.

Along with the increasing number of startups, competition in the industry is getting tighter, so every startup must be able to build a strong identity in order to be able to grow (Sagita et al., 2024; Fatimah et al., 2024). Strategy is a mode or model of planning that managers explicitly develop by identifying the direction of goals, and then developing a plan systematically and measurably so that goals can be achieved (Sari & Soegiarto, 2021), including building brand awareness. Brand awareness leads to the level of public knowledge and awareness of a brand, so it requires the public's ability to recognize and remember a brand as well as associate it with the services or products offered. Brand awareness is the ability of potential customers to recognize and remember a brand. This process involves a series of stages ranging from unawareness to the belief that the brand is the best choice in a particular category of products or services (Kurniawan et al., 2023). Brand awareness has several levels (Warpindyastuti et al., 2021).

- Unaware of Brand: The public is completely unaware of the existence of a brand.
- Brand Recognition: The public begins to recognize a brand after it is reintroduced with help.
- Brand Recall: The public can recall a brand without external help.
- Top of Mind: A brand is the first one that comes to the public's mind when thinking of a certain group of products

One way to build brand awareness is through the right strategy to introduce and promote a company to the public (Zulfikar, 2022; Chamid, 2024). For startups, the right strategy can help a company gain public attention, improve its reputation, and attract investors (Fatimah et al., 2023). Therefore, understanding strategies for building brand awareness is important (Ivena & Natalia, 2023) for startups that want to thrive in today's industry competition. The phenomenon of strategy in building brand awareness not only exists in the real world, but is also depicted in one of the popular media, namely Korean dramas. Korean dramas are popular forms of entertainment in various countries, including Indonesia. By presenting real-life storylines, including in the fields of business and technology, Korean dramas can provide interesting storylines and strong characters (Park et al., 2023). Start-Up is one of the dramas that describes the journey of a startup in building brand awareness.

The Korean drama Start-Up premiered on the tvN and Netflix platforms on October 17, 2020, and ended on December 6, 2020, with 16 episodes (Nurlaila et al., 2024). The drama was directed by Oh Choong-Hwan and Park Hye-Ryun as writers. The main characters are Nam Joo-Hyuk, Nam Do-San, Bae Suzy (Seo Dal-Mi), and Kim Seon-Ho (Han Ji-Pyeong) (Imanda, 2020). The Korean drama Start-Up describes the journey of the Samsan Tech company, which faces various challenges in developing its business. Samsan Tech is a startup that focuses on the development of artificial intelligence (AI)-based technologies and image data processing. This startup was founded by Nam Do-San, a genius programmer, along with his two best friends, Kim Yong-San and Lee Chul-San. In addition to the three founders of Samsan Tech, there are two important characters who play a role in the development of this startup, namely Seo Dal-Mi and Han Ji-Pyeong.

As a new start-up, Samsan Tech must attract investors' attention and build brand awareness by implementing various strategies. The strategies shown in this drama are interesting to study more deeply, especially in the context of building brand awareness for startups in a competitive technology industry. To analyze the strategies used by Samsan Tech, this study will adjust to the application of the Attention, Interest, Desire, Action (AIDA) model and Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis to interpret the symbolic meanings that appear in the Samsan Tech strategy. The AIDA model that attracts attention, creates

interest, fosters desire, and drives public actions. This concept is often used as a guide in strategy because of its simplicity; however, it is still effective in attracting potential customers (Chandra & Sari, 2022). The AIDA model can help the public understand what they want, and includes four main stages (Erlangga et al., 2024):

- Attention: The public is aware only of the presence of a product or service. At this stage, the strategy must effectively attract public attention.
- Interest: When the public starts to take interest in a product or service. At this stage, they look for complete information about the advantages of the product or service offered.
- Desire: When the public begins to desire to purchase a product or service. At this stage, the company must be able to give confidence to the public that the product is in accordance with its needs.
- Action: The final decision of the public to purchase the product or service offered.

The AIDA model has long been used to explain the stages of building consumer awareness and responses to a product or brand. However, this model is considered to be too linear and underrepresents the dynamics of modern consumer behavior, especially in a highly interactive digital context. Criticism of AIDA has led to the emergence of alternative models, such as AIDAS and AISAS, which are more adaptive to current consumer behavior. For example, the attention, interest, search, action, and share (AISAS) model adds elements of information seeking and sharing experiences, which are the main characteristics of consumer interaction in the digital era (Ramadhani et al., 2019; Salsabila et al., 2025). Other research has shown that the share stage has a significant influence on purchase intent, indicating that consumers not only act individually but also shape public opinion through social media (Fannani et al., 2020). Thus, the process of consumer engagement is no longer one-way and linear but rather more complex and iterative (Dandiapuri et al., 2024; Sasmita & Achmadi, 2022).

Nevertheless, the AIDA model was still chosen in this study because of its simple and applicable basic structure, especially in the context of narrative analysis such as in the Korean drama *Start-Up*. This model provides a gradual and systematic mapping of brand awareness strategies based on storylines without the need for real digital behavior data from consumers, as in the AISAS model. In addition, AIDA is more suitable for fictional contexts because it focuses on the visual and dialogical effects of communication rather than on the direct interactive actions of digital users. The use of AIDA in semiotic qualitative research has also been proven relevant in mapping marketing communication strategies in visual narrative media (Erlangga et al., 2024). Therefore, although this study retains the AIDA model as a basic framework because of its simplicity and suitability with the object of study, it is important to be aware of the limitations of the approach and consider the AISAS model as a complement, so that the analysis of brand awareness strategies is more relevant in today's digital marketing ecosystem.

One of the key concepts in Roland Barthes' semiotics is the two-stage theory of significance, which consists of stages of denotation and connotations. A denotation is the literal or objective meaning of a sign that indicates the most tangible meaning of an image, word, or other phenomenon. Connotations involve a more complex meaning; namely, the interpretation of a sign is influenced by the emotions, history, and cultural values of the audience observing it. At this stage of connotation, Roland Barthes introduced the concept of myth. Myths in the context of semiotics are not just stories or legends but also a cultural construct that shapes the way people understand the reality and social phenomena around them (Viranti & Sugiarto, 2020).

The AIDA model has proven to be an effective approach for analyzing strategies, such as in a study of TikTok affiliate users who applied the AIDA model strategy to build Shop Kukai brand awareness (Chai & Aulia, 2024). In addition to the strategic approach to building brand awareness, Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis is also relevant in interpreting the symbolic meaning contained in popular media, such as in a study of the Korean drama today's webtoon, showing that the drama conveys a moral message, namely, helping, a sense of responsibility, and the importance of positive communication (Yudhistira & Yuwono, 2024).

However, research combining the AIDA approach with Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis to analyze brand awareness strategies in startups, especially in popular media, is still limited. On the one hand, the AIDA model provides an overview of the linear process in building brand awareness. However, this model is less able to explore the deeper meanings implied in the narratives and visual elements used in marketing, especially in the context of popular media, such as Korean dramas. On the other hand, Barthes's semiotics offers an approach to explore the symbolic meanings contained in the elements of the media, such as signs, connotations, and myths, that shape the audience's perception of the brand.

This study combines these two theories with the aim of providing a deeper insight into brand awareness strategies in startups, especially in Korean drama *Start-Up*. The AIDA model is used to understand how Samsan Tech builds brand awareness through clear stages, namely, attracting the attention of the audience, generating interest in the products and services offered, developing the desire to own the product, and finally encouraging the audience to take action (such as investing or joining a company). However, to gain a deeper understanding of how the messages and symbols used in the play *Start-Up* serve to influence the audience, Barthes' semiotic analysis is used. In this context, Barthes's semiotics explores the symbolic meanings contained in the visual, verbal, and narrative elements in the play, such as the characters that represent the company's values, the products used, and the way they are positioned in the story. Barthes also offers a view of how myths constructed through the media can shape the audience's view of a brand or company.

By combining AIDA and Barthes' semiotics, this study not only examines how Samsan Tech captures the audience's attention and builds brand awareness through the stages of AIDA, but also how the symbolic elements in the drama build a deep layer of meaning, which enriches the audience's experience and strengthens their impression of the brand. Through semiotic analysis, these symbols will show how *Start-Up* dramas not only create brand awareness directly, but also instill values relevant to the audience through the hidden meanings that exist behind the story and characters. By combining these two theories, this study makes a stronger theoretical contribution to the study of brand awareness, especially in the context of startups.

## **2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study uses a qualitative approach with the Roland Barthes semiotics method and descriptive content analysis. Qualitative research uses descriptive analysis to prioritize the process of searching for meaning to provide opportunities to find new theories, completeness of data, and comprehensiveness (Waruwu, 2024; Hafizah et al., 2024). The researcher chose qualitative research because it was possible to obtain answers without relying on numerical data or prioritizing data collection from direct observation as a source of information. The research was conducted online on the Korean drama *Start-Up* on the Netflix platform from February to May 2025. The object of the research was *Start-Up*, a start-up business-themed drama that premiered in October 2020 and ended in December 2020, with a total of 16 episodes.

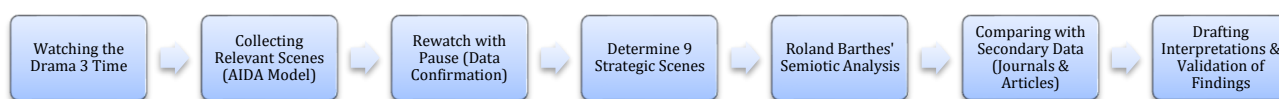
This study used data collection techniques in the form of documentation and observation. Documentation is a technique that collects data in the form of social media information, documents, videos, and antiques (Waruwu, 2024). The documents in this study are in the form of videos, scene clips, and dialogue transcripts of the Korean drama *Start-Up*. The documents used were strategically selected based on scenes that contained the interaction of the Samsan Tech brand with other characters, product displays, and situations that showed the stages of the AIDA model. Observation is the activity of observing an object with relevant categories in the form of individual characteristics, including gestures, interactions, actions, and the physical environment (Waruwu, 2024). This study used observations without participation or not being directly involved in the research object. The researcher plays the role of an observer who records information relevant to the purpose of the research (Hafizah et al., 2024). Observation was carried out by watching each episode three times, where the first process was to understand the storyline; the second was to mark and record relevant scenes; and the third was to pause per scene to observe the visual, symbolic, and communication expressions in the scene. The data sources used are primary data obtained from Korean drama scene clips of *Start-Up* and secondary data obtained from literature reviews in the

form of journals and previous research. The scene selection process is performed based on the indicators in the AIDA model:

- Attention: A scene showing how the audience's attention or other characters in the drama are directed at Samsan Tech.
- Interest: A scene showing the interest of the character or the public in their products/services.
- Desire: scenes that show the desire to support, cooperate, or buy a product.
- Action: scenes that depict real actions, such as funding, product use, or partnership.

In analyzing the data, this study uses content analysis, used to categorize each scene based on stages in the AIDA model. This process is performed by creating a coding sheet that records episodes and minutes of occurrences, the figures involved, the main dialogue, striking visuals such as interactions, products, and logos, and the AIDA category. In addition, this study used semiotic analysis, which is limited by Roland Barthes' theory. Semiotics is a branch of communication science that studies how people produce meaning and messages in communication systems (Prasetya, 2022). Each scene that has been categorized by the AIDA model is then analyzed based on Roland Barthes' three stages, namely denotation, connotation, and myth. Thus, the AIDA model provides a structure for how brand awareness is built, while Roland Barthes' semiotics delves into the hidden meanings and ideological messages behind the strategy.

To ensure the validity of the data and minimize bias, this study used a thoughtful observational method. The thoughtful observation method is one way of qualitative research to test the credibility or validity of the data. The thoughtful observation method refers to the re-examination of the data produced by conducting routine observations and reading various references to research results or documentation so that researchers gain a lot of understanding (Mekarisce, 2020).



**Figure 1. Diagram of Steps Based on Observation Diligence**

*Source: Data processed by researchers (2025)*

Based on Figure 1, the researcher took several steps including the following:

- Watched Korean Drama Start-Up three times.  
The researcher conducted full drama screening three times. The goal is to understand the storyline, characters, and dynamics that occur in drama in depth. This process is important so that the researcher cannot miss important information related to the research topic.
- Collect scene information related to the AIDA model strategy.  
After thoroughly understanding the story, the researcher began to filter out scenes related to the implementation of brand awareness strategies using the AIDA model by the fictitious company Samsan Tech.
- Rewatch dramas with periodic pauses to confirm the data accuracy.  
The researcher replayed parts of the drama that had been categorized as relevant. In this process, periodic pauses are used to record, re-observe visual and verbal expressions, and verify the relationship between scenes and AIDA theories.
- We determine nine strategic scenes that are in line with AIDA's model strategy.  
From the results of repeated observations, it was concluded that there were nine scenes that were appropriate for each element in the AIDA model. This scene was the main object of further analysis.
- Each scene was analyzed using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach.



Each scene is analyzed using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, especially with a two-stage approach to meaning, namely denotation and connotation, as well as myth as cultural markers. This analysis explores the symbolic and ideological meanings of the visualization of brand awareness in dramas.

- The results of the analysis were compared with secondary data (journals and articles).  
The researcher not only relies on primary data (scenes in dramas) but also compares it with literature reviews from journals, scientific articles, and branding theories to strengthen the validity of the findings.
- Drafting of final interpretations and validating the findings.  
The final step is to summarize the findings and semiotic interpretations of the seven scenes and assess their consistency with the AIDA model framework and relevance to the context of brand awareness strategies in startups.

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

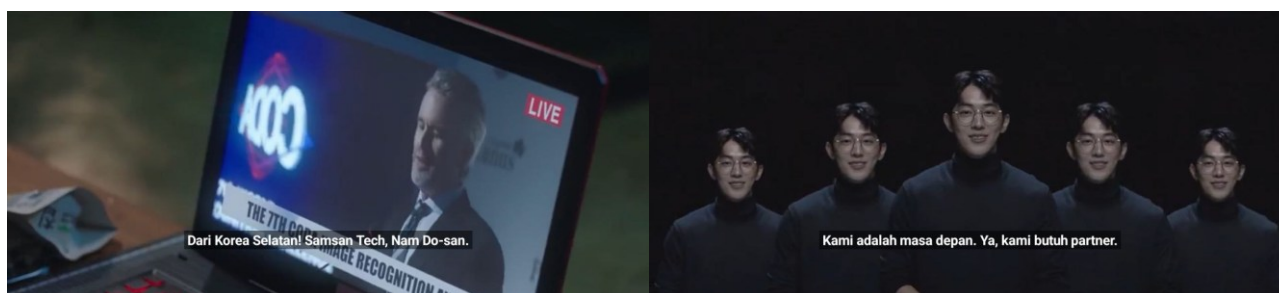
Start-Up is a South Korean drama set up in the world of South Korean startups, specifically in a fictional environment called the Sandbox, which is a place for young entrepreneurs to develop innovative ideas (Imanda, 2020). Drama has achieved high ratings and is popular in various countries because it features realistic business journeys and challenges in building a startup. The Korean drama Start-Up is set up in Sandbox, a business ecosystem for startups in South Korea. The story in this drama focuses on Seo Dal-Mi's life journey, an ambitious woman who aspires to become a successful businessman. Seo Dal-Mi grew up with her grandmother because she had to separate from her mother and brother, Won In Jae. During high school, Seo Dal-Mi received many letters from a boy named Nam Do-San which turned out to be written by Han Ji-Pyeong, an orphan who was secretly cared for by Seo-Dalmi's grandmother (KapanLagi.com, 2023).

On the other hand, Nam Do-San is a genius programmer who founded Samsan Tech with his two best friends, Kim Yong-San and Lee Cheol-San. Despite its exceptional expertise in technology, Samsan Tech has struggled to find investors and is not thriving. After meeting Seo Dal-Mi, Nam Do-San and his team were able to join a startup competition in Sandbox and develop artificial intelligence (AI) technology. Seo Dal-Mi plays the role of the CEO of Samsan Tech, while Nam Do-San and his team are technical developers. In Sandbox, they have to compete with various other startups, including one founded by Won In-Jae. Business conflicts are increasingly complex when Samsan Tech faces various major challenges such as investment and acquisition problems. In Samsan Tech's journey to face these challenges, Han Ji-Pyeong is a mentor in Sandbox who provides direction and solutions to every problem (Aditya, 2022). The drama showcases the challenges faced by young entrepreneurs in building a startup from scratch, including the importance of teamwork, business decisions, and personal relationship processes that affect life journeys, and shows that startup success comes from good teamwork in developing business strategies. This study finds that Samsan Tech used AIDA's strategy to build brand awareness as a start-up.

#### **3.1. Attention**

Samsan Tech is trying to attract public attention in several ways that have been successfully spread in the mass media and social media. Some of the ways it is done are participating in international competitions and winning first place, as well as participating in startup competitions in Sandbox.

##### **a. Participating in International Competitions and Winning 1st Place**



**Figure 2. Samsan Tech Won 1st Place in CODA Competition**

**Source:** Netflix (2020)

As shown in Figure 2, Samsan Tech is portrayed as the winner of the CODA competition, which highlights the company's credibility on a global scale. In scene episode 3, minutes 01:18:29 – 01:19:50.

Host : *"We will announce the first winner of the seventh CODA image recognition competition. The winner is from South Korea! Samsan Tech, Nam Do-San. Unfortunately, Samsan Tech couldn't be present today. So, he will give greetings via video. Let's take a look at the CEO of Samsan Tech, Nam Do-San."*

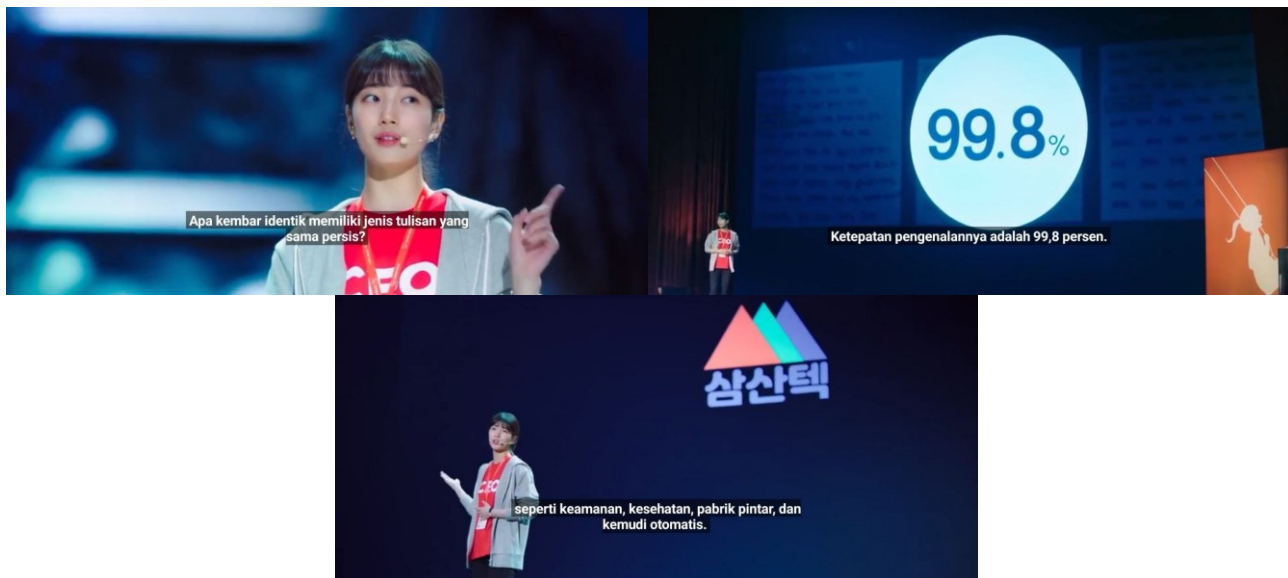
Nam Do-San : *"Hello! My name is Nam Do-San. I'm the CEO of Samsan Tech. We are the future. Yes, we need a partner. We'll make a lot of money! Goodbye."*

The announcement of Samsan Tech's victory in CODA international competition shows that this South Korean startup has been recognized globally as a competent company, which has the potential to increase the trust of potential investors and business partners. This victory was well utilized by Samsan Tech to build brand image and awareness in front of the international community through a creative video delivered by the CEO Nam Do-San. In the video, Nam Do-San introduces herself and conveys an ambitious message that they are the "future" and need partners to grow, accompanied by a firm statement that they will make a lot of money, which shows that their business has great profit potential. The video shows Nam Do-San in a simple black outfit and dark background, as well as his symmetrical doubling on the screen, which shows a sense of seriousness, professionalism, and team strength despite appearing alone. This visual communication strategy is in line with the theory of symbolic interactionism, in which meaning is formed through symbols and interactions, whereby the visual appearance of leaders can create perceptions of the company's values and identity (Citraningsih & Noviandari, 2022). This overall look reinforces his image as a confident, ambitious, and visionary leader, while also reflecting the myth that small startups with advanced technology can grow into future leaders, and CEOs in today's startup world are not only leaders but also symbols of innovation and success. This is in line with the concept of CEO branding, where the company's leaders are not only managers but also part of a marketing strategy that can build a company's reputation through their personalities and public image (Md Saad & Yaacob, 2021). The simplicity of the visual display combined with face-focused lighting confirms that intelligence, professionalism, and cohesiveness are key elements of today's technological world, while Samsan Tech's success in the international arena reinforces the notion that global achievement signifies the quality and competitiveness of a company.

The strategy applied by Samsan Tech in the Start-Up drama by utilizing the victory of international competitions as a moment to build brand awareness is also reflected in real practice by Indonesian startups such as Karla Bionics. Karla Bionics is a startup fostered by the Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB) that develops technology-based prosthetic hands, winning 3rd place in the CYBATHLON Challenges 2022 international competition organized by ETH Zurich, Switzerland. Participation in this competition not only showcases their technological capabilities but also serves as an exposure strategy to introduce Karla Bionics's name and innovation to the

global stage. This achievement has succeeded in increasing the startup's credibility as an innovator in the field of health technology in Indonesia while opening up opportunities for international partners and investors (Permana, 2022). In the context of brand awareness, success in international competitions validates the quality of products and the business vision they offer. This strategy is in line with marketing communication theory, which states that third-party endorsements, such as awards or race wins, can strengthen public reputation and trust in the brand (Belch & Belch, 2018). This shows that winning in the competition is not only an achievement but also a means of forming a professional, credible, and promising image in the eyes of the public and stakeholders.

**b. Participation in the Sandbox Startup Competition.**



**Figure 3. Participate in the Sandbox Startup Competition**

*Source: Netflix (2020)*

Based on Figure 3, Seo Dal-Mi presents an innovation from Samsan Tech as a participation in a startup competition in the Sandbox. In scene episode 5, minutes 55:47 – 59:00.

Seo Dal-Mi : "I'm Seo Dal-Mi, CEO of Samsan Tech, a company that innovates through artificial intelligence. Before I begin, I want to ask you a question. Do identical twins have the same type of writing? Yes, the answer is different. The results of an experiment from a letter researcher in the United States explain that identical twins have a completely different type of writing. So, handwriting can also be referred to as fingerprints from the brain that have their own uniqueness. Thus, handwriting is usually made a tool for self-confirmation in many organizations such as banks, prosecutors' offices, forensic institutions, and national taxation. However, it is very easy to forge writing and signatures. The counterfeiting is up to eight percent, but experts can analyze it very little. There are only about 20 expert analysts in the court. What if artificial intelligence could provide help for experts? If you include a lot of original and fake handwriting, and then learn it with machine learning, can't a forgery be discovered? We, Samsan Tech, managed to find the answer in three days and two nights during back week. The service analyzes the characteristics of each signature and handwriting with 10,000 tests at Jeonghan bank and determines its authenticity. The accuracy of the identification is 99.8 percent. For three days, I looked at all the processes leading up to the formation of this number. I couldn't sleep at all. It may be just handwritten identification, but this technology will be able to provide advances in various services such as security, health, smart factories, and automated steering. Starting this journey with Samsan Tech, I am very happy. I hope the Sandbox can be the start of this journey. Thanks."

Seo Dal-Mi's presentation as the CEO of Samsan Tech in the drama Start-Up shows courage, confidence, and leadership in the world of startups. The visual of him wearing a red T-shirt with



the words "CEO" written on stage with the spotlight and background of the Samsan Tech logo creates a formal moment that strengthens the company's professional image and readiness to compete in the technology industry. In her presentation, Seo Dal-Mi built an emotional engagement through reflective questions about the uniqueness of human handwriting, which was then logically linked to Samsan Tech's artificial intelligence (AI)-based technological innovation, which is a system that is able to identify the authenticity of handwriting with up to 99.8 percent accuracy. The data become the foundation of trust and strengthen the company's image as a research-based innovation actor relevant to industry needs. This strategy shows how technological communication can be wrapped with a narrative and emotional approach to create a connection with the audience, which in communication theory is known as narrative transportation, when the audience is carried away in the story to trust the message conveyed (Thomas & Grigsby, 2024).

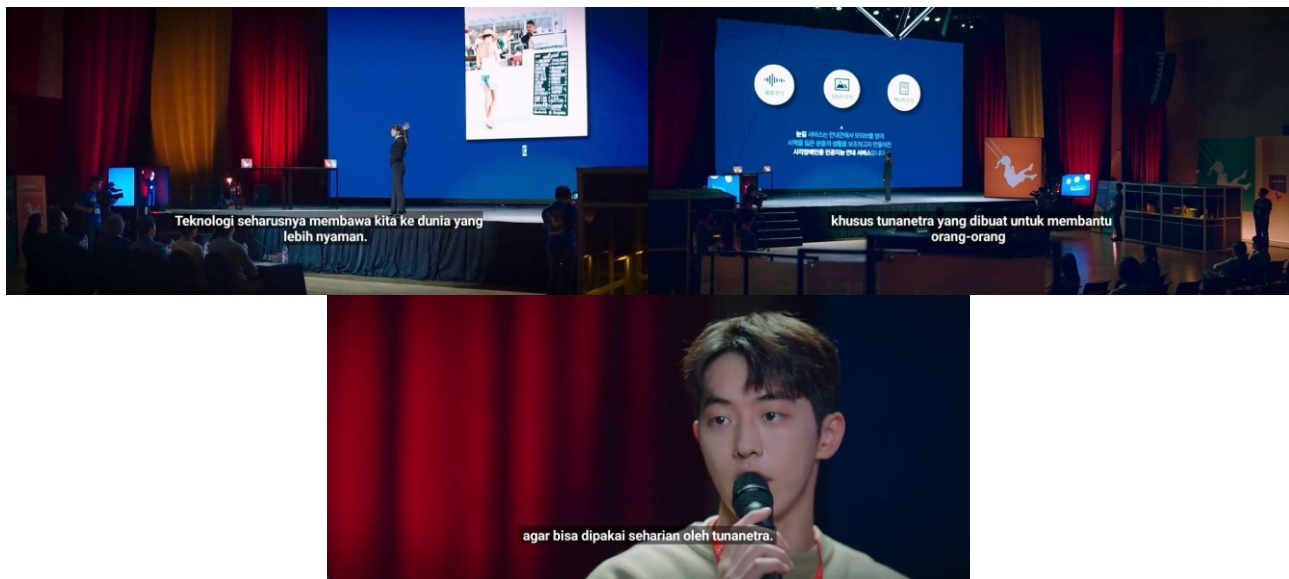
Seo Dal-Mi also emphasized that their technology has broad potential in various sectors such as security, healthcare, smart factories, and automated steering, which is an attraction for potential investors and stakeholders. The visual design of the presentation, which is dominated by blue and white colors, strengthens the impression of modernity, cleanliness, and trustworthiness. This is in line with the visualrhetoricalc principle in business communication, which states that visual elements can shapeane audience's perception of credibility (Musliadi et al., 2025). The narrative of the Sandbox competition as the cradle of innovation also creates the myth that startup success must go through selection and competitive challenges, internalizing values such as hard work, perseverance, and intelligence as a condition for success while elevating the image of young women leaders as a symbol of gender equality in the world of technology.

The fictional story is a real reflection of the Indonesian startup world, as shown by Nodeflux, a startup that develops artificial intelligence technology. Nodeflux actively participates in various accelerator programs and national and international competitions, such as the NTT Startup Challenge, AWS Activate, and the Indigo Creative Nation by Telkom Indonesia. Through this participation, Nodeflux positions itself as a local AI pioneer that can compete globally (Meodia, 2020). Just as Samsan Tech uses the competition stage as a strategy to build brand awareness and credibility, Nodeflux also uses this stage as a strategic communication medium to show its technological capabilities to the public, industry partners, and investors. This active participation not only opens up funding and mentoring opportunities, but also strengthens Indonesia's positioning as a technological solution to real-world challenges such as public safety and broadcasting.

In this context, startup competitions can be seen as a form of strategic communication platform, which is a planned communication space that allows organizations to build an image and reputation and reach stakeholders widely (Cornelissen, 2023). Nodeflux proves that the myth displayed in Start-Up, namely the success of startups born from hard work, strategies, and opportunities in the accelerator program, is not just a fictional narrative but can be realized in real practice through strong communication and consistency in displaying technological innovations.

### **3.2. Interest**

After public attention was reached, Samsan Tech managed to qualify for the Sandbox competition and continued its steps to arouse public interest. This step was also widespread in the mass media, namely, making presentations by displaying interesting product innovations.



**Figure 4. Seo Dal-Mi and Nam Do-San Presenting during Demo Day at Sandbox**

**Source:** Netflix (2020)

Based on Figure 4, the Samsan Tech team is presenting Noongil app during a demo day in the sandbox. In scene episode 11, minutes 31:52 – 35:22.

Seo Dal-Mi : "Do it. I'm the CEO of Samsan Tech. My name is Seo Dal-Mi. Technology is supposed to bring us to a more comfortable world. However, there are also people who feel uncomfortable because of technology. One of them is the visually impaired. If we continue to innovate without thinking about them, there may be many people who will be hurt because they cannot adapt. We at Samsan Tech think that technology is not just an innovation, but it should also be useful for people like them. I'm going to show you the technology. Yeongsil, can you read the writing in front of me?"

Yeongsil (AI) : "Noongil is a blind artificial intelligence guidance service created to help visually impaired people, inspired by blind animals."

Yoon Seon-Hak : "The number of blind people in Korea is around 250,000 people, right? Since this solution is limited to one community, I think the market will be very small. Isn't that?"

Seo Dal-Mi : "Our market is 40 million blind people from all over the world. Now, our services are in English, and Chinese. In the future we will offer it in other languages."

Alex : "I am very interested in Samsan Tech's technology. May I know how accurate your person's identification is?"

Seo Dal-Mi : "Our people accuracy is 92.4 percent."

Alex : "Your numbers are a little lower than the previous team?"

Nam Do-San : "Not so. Accuracy cannot be compared from numbers alone. The situation is also very influential. As is known, Noongil is a mobile app. So, the battery used should not be too large so that it can be used all day by the visually impaired. Therefore, we look for a common ground between high levels of accuracy and reduced application size."

Samsan Tech's presentation in the Demo Day at the Sandbox in the Start-Up drama showcased technological innovations that were not only technically advanced, but also the value of social empathy. Seo Dal-Mi, as CEO, opened the presentation by emphasizing that technology should make life more comfortable, especially for vulnerable groups such as the visually impaired. The product they introduced, Noongil, was specifically designed to help the visually impaired recognize writing and understand the surrounding environment, making technology a symbol of concern for humanity. Together with Nam Do-San, Seo Dal-Mi stood on stage wearing formal clothes with confident gestures, building a professional image that was reinforced by a simple yet informative presentation design, as well as the dominance of blue, which gave the impression of calm and trust. In the question and answer session, when asked about

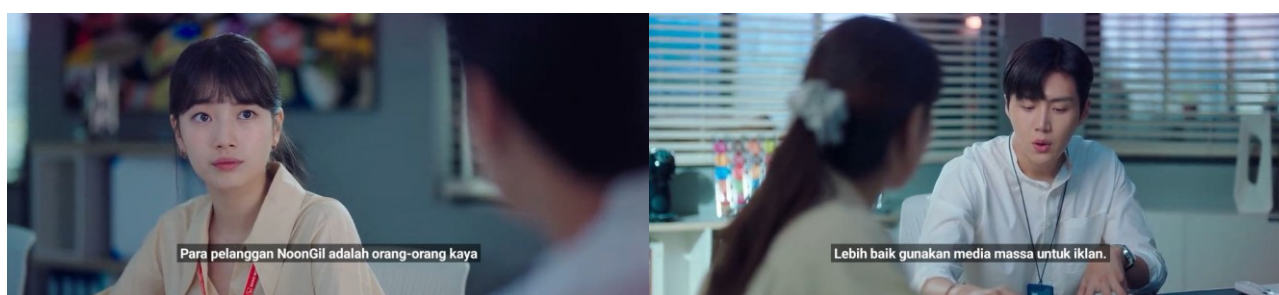
a blind market that is considered small, Seo Dal-Mi expanded the scope of the issue by saying that there are 40 million blind people in the world. Meanwhile, Nam Do-San provided a technical explanation of the importance of battery efficiency in everyday application use by pointing out that their product focuses not only on performance but also on its practical benefits. The communication strategy used by Samsan Tech attracts attention through visual and touching stories, arouses interest in the uniqueness of the product, creates desire through accurate data and the global market, and encourages actions from potential investors to support these innovations (Prabowo, 2025). This presentation also reinforces the myth found in technological culture, namely that artificial intelligence is the savior of humanity, a narrative that is included in the concept of technological utopianism, where technology is believed to be able to overcome limitations and create a better future (Azizi, 2023).

A similar narrative is not only present in fiction but is also reflected in real practice through Indonesian startups such as Ruangguru. CEO Belva Devara introduced the development of the Roboguru feature, an AI-based technology that allows students to answer questions by taking pictures of them. This innovation was born out of concrete needs during the pandemic, when distance learning made it difficult for students who did not have access to tutoring (Damar, 2021). Like Seo Dal-Mi's presentation, Belva not only presents technology as a product but frames it in a narrative of empathy and social solutions, showing how technology can bridge educational inequality in Indonesia. This strategy shows a form of strategic communication called issue framing, which is the process of packaging an issue to highlight certain dimensions that positively shape public perception (Meilisa & Julianto, 2025). Roboguru is not only a learning tool but also a symbol of startups' alignment with educational inclusion, strengthening the brand as a humanist and solution-oriented startup. In this context, both Samsan Tech and Ruangguru present an ideal representation of startups that combine technology and social care, an approach that is increasingly relevant in the digital age, when technology is no longer just functional but also has to be empathetic.

### 3.3. Desire

After successfully winning the startup competition in Sandbox, Samsan Tech continued its steps to turn interest from the public into a desire to own or support their business. Some of these steps include relationships with well-known investors as mentors, showing business growth potential, and relationships with well-known athletes as influencers.

#### a. Relationships with Famous Investors as Mentors



**Figure 5. Seo Dal-Mi Consults with Han Ji-Pyeong**

*Source: Netflix (2020)*

As shown in Figure 5, Seo Dal-Mi as the CEO of Samsan Tech consulted with Han Ji-Pyeong regarding Noongil app. In scene episode 9, minutes 18:10 – 19:03.

Han Ji-Pyeong : *“If it were you, I would manage customers like I would manage users.”*

Seo Dal-Mi : *“Aren't customers and consumers the same?”*

Han Ji-Pyeong : *“Usually so. But it's different with Noongil. Noongil's business does not get money from users. Noongil's customers are wealthy people who agree with this business. Currently, Noongil customers are only Morning Group. You must be able to distinguish between business models and revenues. You also have to pay attention to ads if you want to attract other customers. Think about the purpose of*

*this service, and get the customer interested. Then, for advertising, it is better to use mass media. You should continue to advertise this service through interviews, as well as create issues to attract other customers.”*

In the scene featuring Seo Dal-Mi and Han Ji-Pyeong in the boardroom, it is seen how a mentor plays an important role in the business development strategy of the startup Samsan Tech. Han Ji-Pyeong, as an experienced mentor, emphasized that Noongil is not a product that seeks direct profit from its users, but rather from wealthy customers who support the social value of the innovation. Han Ji-Pyeong suggested the importance of a marketing approach through mass media, interviews, and the creation of public issues to attract attention, expand reach, and form a positive perception of the company. This strategy reflects the principle of strategic marketing communication, in which the media play a central role in building brand awareness and creating public trust (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Dal-Mi's professional style of dress and serious attitude presents her as a young woman who is business-mature and proficient in communication, while Han Ji-Pyeong appears as a firm and credible mentor figure, showing that the presence of authoritative figures in the startup ecosystem is an important factor in business validation. Han Ji-Pyeong's remarks such as "Noongil's customers are rich people who agree with this business" affirm that startups not only sell products, but also value, so that the trust of the elite can be a symbolic capital that elevates the status of the brand (Aziz & Albari, 2023). Ji-Pyeong's strategy is in line with the concept of agenda-setting in mass communication, namely how the media can influence what is considered important by the public so that broad coverage can magnify startups' chances of gaining the attention of investors and the market (Oldisan et al., 2025).

The same strategy has proven effective in the real world through accelerator programs such as Antler and the Founder Institute, which not only provide seed funding with an offer of up to IDR 1.9 billion for early-stage startups, but also provide mentorship from experienced founders and executives (Prima, 2023). In this context, the existence of influential mentors not only provides strategic direction but also strengthens the attractiveness of startups in the eyes of the public and investors. This reinforces the myth depicted in the Start-Up drama scene, namely, that startups that have the support of well-known mentors and investors are considered more valuable than those that develop independently. In addition, mass media-based marketing strategies affirm that public exposure has the power to shape perceptions, attract customers, and create greater business growth opportunities in the digital economy.

## b. Demonstrating Business Growth Potential

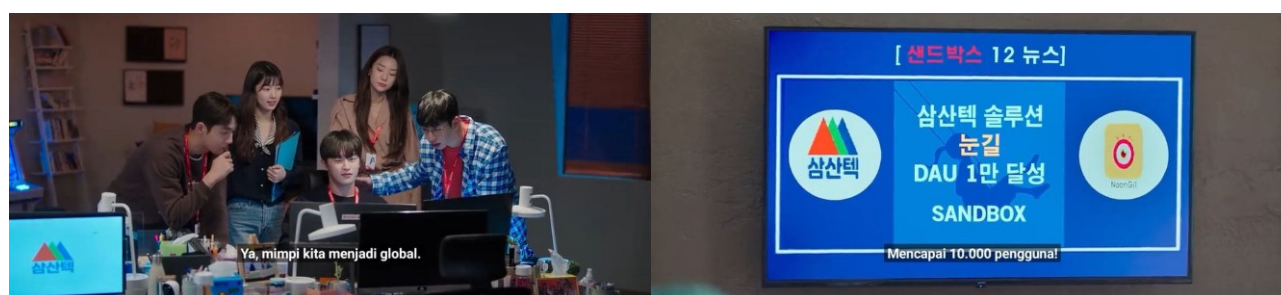


Figure 6. Noongil Reaches 10,000 Users

Source: Netflix (2020)

As shown in figure 6, the Samsan Tech team planned to upload the Noongil app globally, and it eventually proved to be successful in reaching 10,000 users at the beginning of the launch. In scene episode 8, minutes 40:27 – 40:42.

Kim Yong-San : *“What if we upload it all over the world?”*

Seo Dal-Mi : *“Hey. Isn't it too soon for that?”*

Jang Sa-Ha : *“Why? Uploading is free. Just do it.”*



Lee Cheol-San : “Yes, our dream is to go global.”

Kim Yong-San : “Good. I'll upload it.”

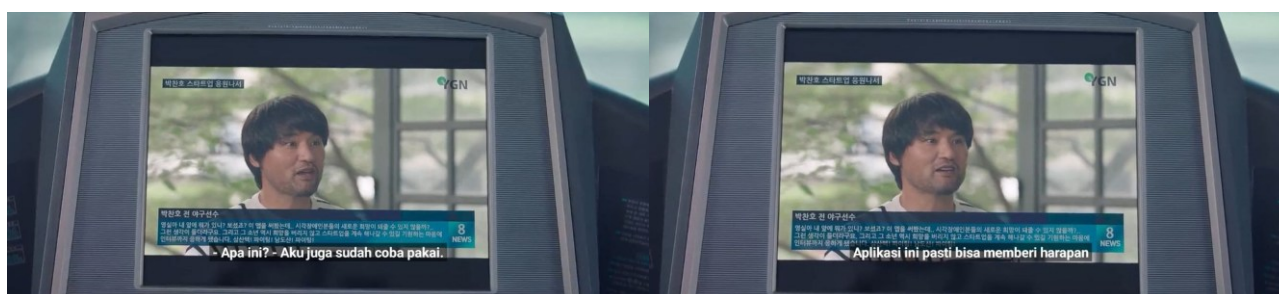
In scene episode 8, minutes 54:04 – 54:15.

Lee Cheol-San : “Succeed! We are from Samsan Tech. We made Noongil! Reach 10,000 users!”

The visualization of five Samsan Tech team members discussing in front of a computer screen while wearing ID cards against the background of television news featuring the logos of Samsan Tech and Noongil, which has reached 10,000 users, reflects the spirit of togetherness, hard work, and cohesiveness in realizing the big vision of the startup. Their decision to launch the Noongil application globally, although it was doubted by Seo Dal-Mi because he felt that the time was not right, actually became a strategic move that proved to be successful when the application reached 10,000 users in the first week. This success confirms the importance of courage to take risks in the startup world, in line with the theory of entrepreneurial orientation, which emphasizes innovation and risk-taking as key to the growth of new businesses (Krisdiana et al., 2025). Lee Cheol-San's saying, "Yes, our dream is to go global," reinforces the narrative that Samsan Tech has ambitions to penetrate the international market, and is not just content to be in the local realm. The figure of 10,000 users serves as a symbol of the market's initial validation of product quality, reflecting the importance of user growth as an indicator of early stage startup success (Affandi et al., 2025). The appearance of Samsan Tech in media coverage also shows how media exposure can strengthen the legitimacy and attractiveness of a startup in the eyes of both the public and investors.

The display of the Samsan Tech logo with three triangles in red, green, and blue symbolizes stability, growth, and technological advancement and becomes an identity visual that strengthens the company's image as a symbol of future innovation. This success has shaped the myth of how high-spirited young people can conquer the world through technology while reinforcing the belief that the ever-growing number of users is a key determinant of a startup's reputation and business prospects, even before it makes huge financial gains. This strategy is also seen in the practice of Indonesian edutech startups such as Ruangguru, which, as of 2022, claims to have more than 38 million registered users and access applications up to 200 million times per month. These numbers are used as a form of validation of business growth and market attractiveness, and as a tool to build reputation and attract the attention of investors, the public, and strategic partners (Shahnaz, 2022). Thus, the user growth narrative not only reflects the technical success of the product but also becomes an important instrument in shaping the image and competitiveness of startups in the digital era.

### c. Relationships with Famous Athletes as Influencers



**Figure 7. Athlete Park Chan-Ho's Interview About Samsan Tech**

**Source:** Netflix (2020)

Based on Figure 7, Samsan Tech has a relationship with athlete Park Chan-Ho who was interviewed by the media that he has proven the Noongil application to be supported and used. In scene episode 8, minutes 52:46 – 54:00.

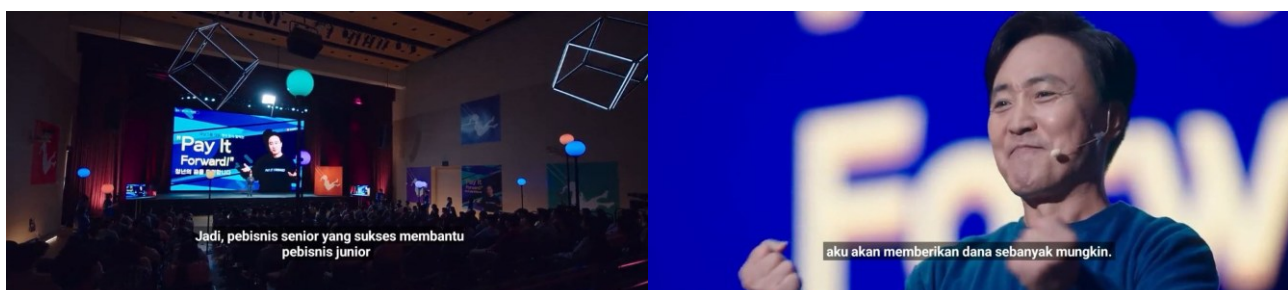
Park Chan-Ho : *“Once upon a time, there was a child named Nam Do-San. That he is an adult and started a startup. The goods are detected by image recognition techniques. Then the results are voiced through audio. Hopefully the young man will never give up and continue to run his startup successfully. That's why I wanted to be interviewed. I have also tried using it. This application can definitely give hope to the visually impaired. Nam Do-San fighting! Samsan Tech fighting!”*

The interview featuring Park Chan-Ho, a former South Korean baseball player, by YGN News presented a natural, relaxed atmosphere that reflected sincerity and warmth, thus fostering the impression that the support provided was not just a formal promotion but from personal experience and sincere belief. In the interview, Park Chan-Ho explained that Samsan Tech's Noongil app uses image recognition technology that helps blind people by converting visual information into sound, and he even added, "I've tried it too" and "This app can definitely give hope to people with visual impairments." These sayings build a strong emotional connection between the product and the public, as well as provide social validation that Noongil is truly useful and trustworthy. The support of public figures such as Park Chan-Ho has significant symbolic power because it creates the perception that the products used and recommended by the respected figures must be of high quality. This phenomenon can be explained through the source credibility theory, which states that the effectiveness of communication is greatly influenced by the public's perception of the communicator's credibility, which includes expertise and trustworthiness (Karim et al., 2024). In addition, the emergence of well-known national figures as supporters strengthens social legitimacy and accelerates the process of public recognition of startups. As explained in the theory of institutional legitimacy, recognition from influential actors strengthens the position and social acceptance of a new entity (Integra, 2024).

A similar strategy is also applied by Indonesian startups, such as Tokopedia, which collaborates with the South Korean boy group BTS as a brand ambassador. The presence of BTS has been proven to significantly increase brand awareness, brand image, and consumers' desire to make purchases (Saputri et al., 2023). This confirms that collaborations with well-known public figures not only increase brand exposure but also strengthen consumer trust and loyalty, as well as build a narrative that the brand deserves to be part of the modern lifestyle. Therefore, the involvement of public figures such as Park Chan-Ho and BTS in supporting startups shows that external credibility is an important strategy for shaping public perception and building a sustainable business reputation.

### 3.4. Action

After building credibility and demonstrating its growth potential, Samsan Tech sought to encourage the public to take real action in the form of investment and support for their company. This effort also involves mass media, namely inviting investors to invest.





**Figure 8. Morning Group Becomes Samsan Tech's Official Investor**

**Source:** Netflix (2020)

As shown in Figure 8, the Morning Group director announced a large investment for Samsan Tech and was proud to have accepted the invitation to cooperate. In scene episode 8, minutes 01:10:33 – 01:11:20.

Won Du-Jeong: *"In Silicon Valley, there is a culture of spreading kindness. It means that successful senior businessmen provide assistance to junior businessmen who are just starting a business selflessly. Today, I, as a successful senior businessman, want to practice that culture here. Corporate social responsibility Morning Group provided funding this year by selecting Samsan Tech's Noongil business from its 12th Sandbox membership program. Noongil is a partner for the visually impaired. So, as a form of support from me, I will provide as much funding as possible."*

In scene episode 9, minutes 21:29 – 21:53.

Won Du-Jeong: *"There is a saying that seniors help junior success. This means that seniors can successfully follow the steps of seniors. The juniors want to follow in my footsteps. So what should I do? Of course, I have to guide them. So, I made a decision. I am very happy to be able to provide financial support for Noongil. Thank you to Seo Dal-Mi, CEO of Samsan Tech for giving us this great opportunity."*

The visualization of the big stage, the formal presentation, and the dominance of the blue color in the "Pay It Forward" program featuring the director of the Morning Group, Won Du-Jeong, created an impression of high credibility, the seriousness of the company, and reinforced the value of trust in the intention to help selflessly as part of corporate social responsibility (CSR). The casual attire and ID card worn by Won Du-Jeong show an approach with the public, bridging the image of a large corporation with the wider community. Won Du-Jeong's statement that the support for Samsan Tech is based on the spirit of "Spread Kindness" which is a common principle in Silicon Valley where senior entrepreneurs help junior entrepreneurs, indicates that this investment is not purely transactional, but a form of venture philanthropy or strategic philanthropy, where capital is directed to drive long-term social impact (Hayes, 2022). His words such as "I will provide as much funding as possible" and "I am very happy to be able to provide financial support for Noongil" show a personal attachment to the product's social mission, while creating the perception that startups like Samsan Tech are not only worthy of support, but also a forum for real social change.

Media coverage such as the YGN News expanded this support, making the investment event a mass communication strategy that strengthened Samsan Tech's credibility in the eyes of the public. In this context, the media plays the role of an agent of social legitimacy that accelerates the recognition of new actors in the market system (Fadly, 2024). This gives rise to the myth that the success of startups depends on the support of big figures or institutions, and not just the result of innovation and hard work. The visual and verbal narrative that is built reinforces the view that relationships, reputation, and access to external resources are key components of a startup's journey to success.

A similar phenomenon can also be observed in the real world, as seen in the story of Traveloka, an Indonesian startup in the travel and lifestyle sector that managed to secure funding of IDR 4.5 trillion from large investors such as the Indonesia Investment Authority (INA), BlackRock, and Allianz Global Investors (Saumi, 2022). Support from these prestigious investors not only provides financial support for the business but also serves as a legitimacy tool that raises Traveloka's credibility in the global market. As in the Start-Up series, this investment process has also been covered by national media such as Bisnis.com,

showing how media exposure can be used strategically to strengthen the brand's image and desirability in front of the public and other investors. This is in line with the signaling theory that investment from credible parties serves as a strong signal for the quality and prospects of the company in the eyes of external parties (Nariswari et al., 2025). Thus, in both the fictional and real worlds, the strategy of presenting large investors and strengthening social narratives through the media is a complementary step in forming market trust and accelerating startup growth.

### 3.5. Discussion

In this drama, each stage of the AIDA model is fully described through the challenges faced by the founders of Samsan Tech, which focuses on how brand awareness depends not only on innovation but also on how the startup presents itself to potential investors and consumers. The depiction of the life journey of the CEO and Samsan Tech's team also shows a good teamwork process for building a startup. Seo Dal-Mi as CEO shows that wise leadership is very important in directing business strategy, Nam Do-san and his development team focus on technological innovation, and Han Ji-Pyeong as a mentor is one of the keys to guiding Samsan Tech to improve business development. In addition, Samsan Tech takes advantage of relationships with well-known investors and athletes as influencers through digital platforms. The existence of successful senior investors like Han Ji-Pyeong not only increases Samsan Tech's trust in the eyes of the public but also has a great impact on building brand awareness.

The results of this study show that brand awareness strategies focus not only on marketing aspects but also on reputation and trust formation built through media narratives. This finding confirms and strengthens previous research by Chai and Aulia (2024), who found that brand awareness strategies through social media also use the AIDA model, as TikTok affiliate users do in promoting the Kukai brand. Previous research shows that AIDA is often used in digital marketing to increase brand awareness (Andarini & Saksono, 2022). Additionally, the findings of this study indicate that AIDA can also be depicted in the Korean drama series, allowing more people to gain insight into developing brand awareness. This highlights the uniqueness of the digital learning atmosphere, where people are able to learn from many forms of media content (Fatimah, 2025), including movies and drama series (Hafizah et al., 2024). Therefore, this study expands the understanding of how AIDA's strategy can be applied to entertainment media to shape startups' perceptions.

**Table 1. Resume of Findings: Samsan Tech's AIDA Strategy in Promoting Brand Awareness**

		Denotation	Connotation	Myth
Attention	Participated in the International Competition (CODA) and Won 1st Place	Samsan Tech was announced as the first winner in the CODA competition, and CEO Nam Do-San delivered a video message to introduce himself and build the company's image globally.	The championship at the international level strengthens Samsan Tech's reputation as a potential company and Nam Do-San's video reflects his ambitious leadership, professionalism, and efforts to build investor trust.	Samsan Tech's Championship builds the narrative that small startups with advanced technology can become future leaders.
	Participate in Startup Competitions in the Sandbox	Seo Dal-Mi gave a presentation on Samsan Tech's innovation in detecting handwriting with 99.8 percent accuracy in the Sandbox competition.	Seo Dal-Mi's presentation and performance gave an innovative and professional impression that reinforced the belief in Samsan Tech's technology.	Seo Dal-Mi's presentation builds the narrative that startups' success comes from hard work, innovation, and competition like the Sandbox. In addition, it reinforces the myth that women can be great leaders in the field of technology.
Interest	Presentation by showcasing attractive products	Presentation during Demo Day at Sandbox was conducted by Seo Dal-Mi	Building a professional reputation, confirming that Samsan Tech's technology is	Technology is the lifesaver of mankind and



		and Nam Do-San who introduced Noongil products for the Blind.	advanced and siding with vulnerable groups, and giving the impression of good leadership from Seo Dal-Mi and Nam Do-San in front of the public.	startups play a big role in creating social change.
Desire	Relationships with well-known investors as mentors	Seo Dal-Mi and Han Ji-Pyeong were discussing in a meeting room in formal shirts, talking about Noongil's product business strategy and the importance of mass media.	The visuals and interaction of both reinforce the image of professionalism. Seo Dal-Mi is described as an intelligent woman, while Han Ji-Pyeong is a firm mentor and an expert in business.	Startups that have the support of well-known mentors can grow faster, and mass media can make businesses successful.
	Demonstrate business growth potential	The Samsan Tech team discussed in front of a computer screen to upload the Noongil application, and managed to reach 10,000 users spread across mass media news.	The visualization of a team supporting each other reflects hard work and cohesiveness. In addition, the number of 10,000 users shows that Noongil is really in demand by the public.	Young people with high spirits are able to conquer the world with technology, and the success of startups is determined by the number of users.
	Relationships with well-known athletes as influencers	Park Chan-Ho, a famous former baseball athlete, was interviewed by YGN News about Samsan Tech.	A relaxed and natural interview reflects a genuine atmosphere and not a formal promotion. The support from Park Chanhoo shows that Samsan Tech deserves support.	People tend to trust products that are supported by respected figures, because public figures must only promote quality products.
Action	Inviting Investors to Invest	Morning Group director Won Du-Jeong made a presentation at the "Pay It Forward" program with a big stage, and blue clothes. In addition, he was interviewed by the media about investments for Noongil Samsan Tech products.	The large stage and use of blue in the "Pay It Forward" program reflect the belief in selfless professional help. This support gives the impression that Noongil and Samsan Tech deserve to be supported.	Startups can only succeed with the support of large investors, so the investment from Morning Group gives the impression that Samsan Tech is financially stable and potentially successful.

**Source:** Data processed by researchers (2025)

As shown in Table 1, based on Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis, Samsan Tech successfully implemented the AIDA model with seven stages starting from attracting public attention to successfully inviting large investors. As a fictional representation, Start-Ups is not exempt from limitations. One aspect that needs to be criticized is how the business growth process is ideally portrayed and often unrealistic. For example, Samsan Tech is shown to be able to obtain investment and build a strong image in a short time; in reality, the process takes a long time, involves trial and error, and has limited resources. This shows that while drama can be an educational medium, it is still subject to dramatic logic that often ignores the complexities of business realities, including regulations, market risks, and financial uncertainties that startups usually face. In addition, the drama also tends to portray startup success as a result of the vision of a genius individual (such as Nam Do-San) or the support of influential figures (such as Han Ji-Pyeong) without showing the importance of collective work, data-driven market research, or long-term sustainability strategies. This representation can create a bias in which personal branding and luck are the dominant factors in startup success. In reality, success often comes from data-driven processes and adaptations to market conditions.

An analysis that focuses on fictional media cannot be used as a single reference to draw practical conclusions without the support of empirical data. Therefore, to strengthen the validity and practical application of the findings, it is necessary to compare them with one of the local Indonesian startups that

has implemented a similar strategy, for example, Gojek. Gojek, one of the largest technology startups in Indonesia, is also reflected in practice by Gojek, one of the largest technology startups in Indonesia. Gojek systematically applied the AIDA approach to build a brand in the community. At the attention stage, Gojek attracts public attention through digital campaigns and collaboration with conventional motorcycle taxi drivers as a symbol of local transformation (Nurhalim, 2021). The Interest stage is shown through a variety of services that address the needs of urban consumers, such as Go-Ride, Go-Food, and Go-Send. To create Desire, Gojek conveyed a narrative that emphasizes social impact and partner empowerment, which is packaged in the form of ads and personal stories. Finally, Gojek encourages action through promotional strategies, loyalty programs, and ease of digital transactions (Dewi et al., 2022). By comparing the fictional narrative of Start-Ups with Gojek's reality, it can be seen that while the AIDA principles can be applied in a real business context, their application requires complex adaptations involving market research, collaborative strategies, and careful risk management. This reinforces the conclusion that fictional representations can be used as an entrance to understanding business strategies; however, they need to be complemented by empirical analysis to be relevant and not misleading.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on this research that has been conducted, it can be concluded that Samsan Tech builds brand awareness by implementing the AIDA model strategy. This strategy process was carried out by the CEO of Samsan Tech, the three founders of Samsan Tech, and Han Ji-Pyeong as a mentor. In the attention stage (episodes 3 and 5), Samsan Tech attracted the public's attention with two approaches: a championship in an international competition called CODA, and participation in a startup competition in Sandbox. In the interest stage (episode 11), Samsan Tech aroused public interest by presenting interesting product innovations during Demo Day at Sandbox, which was called Noongil. In the desire stage (episodes 8 and 9), Samsan Tech created a desire from the public to use or support by building relationships with well-known investors as mentors, showing business growth potential, and building relationships with well-known athletes as influencers. Finally, in the action stage (episodes 8 and 9), Samsan Tech seeks to encourage the public to take real action by inviting investors to invest. The medium of delivery is mass media. The strategy implemented by Samsan Tech can be considered successful in building brand awareness. This is evidenced by increased public trust, extensive media exposure, and successful investments. This strategy also shows that brand awareness depends on product quality and consistent communication through mass or digital media.

In addition, out of a total of 16 episodes, researchers found nine scenes in the Korean drama Start-Up that contained symbolic meanings based on the strategy of building Samsan Tech's brand awareness through Roland Barthes' semiotics. Visual elements, such as large stage settings, bright lighting, and formal attire of the characters, symbolize professionalism. The incorporation of this element forms the connotation of achievement and competitiveness. The myth formed is that the startup space is a prestigious competitive space. The visual change in Nam Do-San's dressing style from casual to formal symbolizes a change from a novice programmer to a visionary expert. On the other hand, Seo Dal-Mi wears a red t-shirt with the CEO, symbolizing courage and strength for her identity as a CEO who leads a team. In addition, frequently used colors such as blue and white give the connotation of calm and confidence. The myth is that success can also be achieved through a change in appearance. Body gestures and facial expressions: Excited nervous faces, hand gestures during presentations, and intense eye contact show the sincerity of characters. The connotation is an accurate spirit of struggle. The myth displayed is that sincerity and hard work always lead to success. Visual objects, such as presentation slides and logos: The presence of infographic visuals and company logos connotes professionalism and innovation. The myth is that technology and visual design include language, which can shape the credibility of the public. Every visual element, dialogue, and action in these scenes provides a marker that builds Samsan Tech's brand awareness as a startup that deserves support.

However, as a work of fiction, Start-Up also has limitations in describing the reality of the startup world. The process of image building and business growth in this drama is often portrayed ideally and

instantaneously, ignoring real complexities, such as market risk and the importance of data-driven research. Thus, fictional representations such as in Start-Up dramas can be an interesting starting medium to understand startup branding strategies, but they still need to be equipped with real studies so that they can be used as valid references. For future researchers, it is recommended to make comparisons between the AIDA model and other models, such as AISAS or AIDAS, to determine the effectiveness of communication strategies using various approaches. The research can also be extended by analyzing the representation of startups in other dramas or comparing them to startup branding practices in the real world to produce a more complete perspective.

### **Ethical approval**

This research did not require ethical approval.

### **Informed consent statement**

This research did not require informed consent.

### **Authors' contributions**

Conceptualization, BA., and ANF; methodology, BA., and ANF; validation, BA., ANF., MFR; formal analysis, BA., ANF., MFR., and WPS; investigation, BA., ANF., and QNSEF; resources, BA., ANF., and WPS; writing original draft preparation, BA., and ANF; writing review and editing, BA., ANF., MFR., WPS., and QNS.

### **Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

### **Data availability statement**

The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author due to privacy reasons.

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