

# Beyond Beauty: The Inspiring Journey of Sobella

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## Prologue

In the bustling and ever-evolving beauty industry, only a few brands manage to break through the noise and capture the hearts of consumers. Sobella, a homegrown Malaysian cosmetics brand, is one of those rare gems. Its story is not just about makeup. It is about ambition, courage, and the power of believing in one's dreams.

For founder Wan Nur Syuhada Wan Norzie, the journey began in 2016 when she was a fresh graduate facing a bleak job market. Rejections and unanswered applications could have crushed her spirit, but instead, she decided to carve her own path. With the encouragement of her parents and a strong sense of independence, Syuhada ventured into the cosmetics world. She dreamed of creating products that were not only beautiful but also accessible to everyday women. From that dream, *Sobella*, short for “*So Beautiful*” was born.

## A Leap of Faith in Kelantan

Starting a business was no easy feat, especially in her hometown of Kelantan where opportunities in the beauty industry were limited. For many young graduates, the lack of job opportunities in the East Coast often meant migrating to larger cities in search of work. But Syuhada decided to stay. She saw this not as a barrier but as an opening. Instead of following the crowd, she chose to build something of her own, right where she was planted.

Armed with nothing more than determination, support from her parents, and a small starting capital, she entered the world of cosmetics. She knew that beauty was a universal language and women everywhere whether in

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## KEYWORDS

Malaysian Beauty Industry, Consumer Behaviour, Retail Strategy, Start-Up Resilience

## Disclaimer

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Kota Bharu, Kuala Lumpur, or Johor Bahru wanted products that made them feel confident without costing a fortune.

Her earliest sales were modest, relying on word of mouth among friends and small promotions on social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram. But even in those early days, she had a clear vision, Sobella was not just about makeup, it was about making beauty accessible to everyday women.

The brand quickly resonated with young women who wanted affordable yet stylish cosmetics. The catchy name, the practicality of the products, and Syuhada's own authenticity struck a chord with customers searching for something fresh in a market dominated by international giants. Unlike faceless multinational brands, Sobella had a relatable story, a young Malaysian woman daring to dream big. Customers felt that by supporting Sobella, they were not just buying lipstick or foundation, but also supporting a local dream.

As sales began to pick up, Syuhada realised that she had tapped into something powerful which is the blend of affordability, quality, and emotional connection. Sobella was not trying to be a copy of global beauty brands, however it was carving out its own identity. But with growth came greater challenges. Managing suppliers became increasingly complex as demand outpaced her initial network. At times, late deliveries, product shortages, and quality inconsistencies tested her patience and resilience. Yet, each setback became a lesson. She learned to build stronger relationships with suppliers, to anticipate customer demand, and to streamline her operations.

More importantly, she had to face the reality that her customers were not one homogenous group. Urban consumers craved innovation, exclusivity, and trendy packaging, while rural buyers prioritised price and accessibility. Understanding these nuances of consumer behaviour across different regions became one of the most critical parts of Sobella's journey.

Still, Syuhada pressed on, guided by her belief that Sobella could be more than just another local brand. What started as a modest venture from her home in Kelantan was now slowly transforming

into a movement, one that combined beauty, community, and entrepreneurship into something much bigger than she had ever imagined.

### **The Power of Knowing Your Customers**

From the beginning, one of Syuhada's greatest strengths was her instinct to listen. She didn't just sell products, nevertheless, she paid attention to the women buying them. She read their comments on social media, noticed what they shared with their friends, and observed how their choices shifted over time. Very quickly, she realised that consumer behaviour was not one-size-fits-all.

In big cities like Kuala Lumpur or Johor Bahru, young women wanted cosmetics that felt exclusive. They looked for stylish packaging, trendy shades, and products that reflected international beauty standards. These urban customers were influenced by influencers and online reviews, constantly hunting for "the next big thing." Price was not always their first concern, on the other hand, image and innovation mattered more.

But the picture looked very different in smaller towns and rural areas. There, women wanted affordable, practical products that didn't compromise on quality. Packaging might catch their eye, but what sealed the deal was value for money. For them, a lipstick wasn't just about beauty; it was about stretching their budgets while still enjoying a touch of glamour.

Then came a new wave of consumers: university students and young professionals heavily influenced by the rise of TikTok. For this group, buying cosmetics wasn't about loyalty to a single brand. They wanted whatever was trending, whatever their favourite influencer had just reviewed, or whatever video had gone viral that week. Syuhada quickly understood this shift and pivoted her strategy. Instead of traditional advertising, she invested in digital storytelling, creating short, engaging content that felt authentic, relatable, and shareable.

She also learned to ride the rhythm of festive seasons. During Hari Raya, demand for cosmetics surged as women prepared for celebrations. Syuhada seized this opportunity by offering limited-edition collections, exclusive bundles, and festive promotions that created excitement and urgency.

Customers loved it. They didn't just buy products, they bought into the festive spirit Sobella created.

Impulse buying also became part of her strategy. Time-limited deals, bundle promotions, and "low stock" alerts on TikTok Live gave buyers that extra push to click "buy now." What looked like clever sales tactics was actually the result of Syuhada's careful observation of consumer psychology.

Through all of this, one thing remained constant, she treated her customers like a community, not just buyers. Sobella's growing popularity wasn't simply about lipsticks and foundations, also, it was about women feeling seen, valued, and connected to a brand that understood their world.

### **A Hybrid Path to Growth**

As Sobella grew, the question became: how to expand? Many beauty brands invested heavily in physical stores, decorating them with lights, mirrors, and glamorous displays. But Syuhada knew that such investments were costly and risky for a growing brand. She needed a smarter way. Her answer was a hybrid retail model, a mix of online convenience and offline experiences. Online platforms, especially TikTok Live, allowed Sobella to reach thousands of buyers instantly. A single live session could showcase new products, answer customer questions in real time, and generate a wave of impulse purchases. It was like bringing the shopping experience into people's living rooms.

At the same time, Syuhada built a network of agents and stockists across Malaysia. These partners became the brand's ambassadors, selling in towns and rural areas where physical stores were scarce. Customers could see, test, and buy products directly from someone they trusted in their community. It was a personal touch that no online platform could replicate. Pop-up stores became another powerful tool. Whether at campus events, beauty fairs, or festive bazaars, Sobella's temporary stalls created buzz and excitement. Shoppers could test products, meet influencers, and experience the brand firsthand. Each pop-up wasn't just a sales opportunity, it was also a stage for brand storytelling.

To widen its reach, Sobella also partnered with local boutiques, pharmacies, and convenience stores. By placing its products in everyday shopping spots, the brand increased visibility and accessibility without the burden of managing multiple retail outlets.

This hybrid approach gave Sobella flexibility. It could scale quickly, reduce costs, and meet customers wherever they were, either online or offline, in urban centres or rural towns. It was a strategy built on adaptability, and it proved to be one of the strongest pillars of the brand's growth.

### **Milestones that Shine**

Every entrepreneur dreams of the day their small venture grows into something bigger than themselves. For Syuhada, Sobella's milestones weren't just achievements. They were proof that her leap of faith had been worth it. One of the most defining moments came in 2019, when Sobella held its first-ever convention in Kuala Lumpur. More than 500 agents and stockists from every corner of Malaysia and even representatives from Indonesia, gathered in one ballroom, united by a single brand. For Syuhada, walking onto that stage was overwhelming. Just a few years earlier, she had been a graduate searching for her place in the world. Now, she was leading a movement that empowered hundreds of women to become entrepreneurs through Sobella. The event was more than a convention, rather, it was a celebration of community, resilience, and shared ambition.

The recognition grew louder in 2023, when Sobella earned the Superbrand Award, a title given only to brands with strong reputation, consumer trust, and lasting impact. For an international company, this might have been just another accolade. But for Sobella, a local startup from Kelantan, it was monumental. It proved that a Malaysian brand could stand shoulder to shoulder with global giants and still shine just as brightly. The award was a validation not just of the products, but of the vision and grit that had carried the brand forward.

Another milestone has been Sobella's successful leap into digital-first retailing. While many brands struggled to adapt, Sobella embraced TikTok Live as a new frontier. Each live session became an event in itself, part entertainment, part shopping, and part personal connection. Customers didn't just buy products, though, they tuned in for the experience, chatting with hosts, watching demonstrations, and feeling part of an inside circle. The move allowed Sobella to cut

reliance on third-party agents, strengthen its margins, and most importantly, stay relevant in an industry where trends change by the week.

Together, these milestones tell a powerful story: Sobella isn't just surviving but it is evolving, setting new benchmarks, and showing that a homegrown brand can inspire, lead, and compete on both local and international stages.

### **A Community, Not Just a Brand**

At the heart of Sobella's success lies something deeper than sales charts or product launches, its community. From day one, Syuhada built Sobella on the belief that beauty should be inclusive, accessible, and empowering. Customers didn't just see themselves as buyers; they became part of something larger, a movement that celebrated local talent and everyday women.

Agents and stockists became ambassadors of this vision. For many of them, selling Sobella wasn't only about income, it was about independence and empowerment. Housewives, students, and young professionals alike found in Sobella an opportunity to build their own small businesses. Through training, conventions, and recognition, Syuhada turned her network of agents into a family. Their stories became intertwined with Sobella's story, proving that the brand wasn't only about cosmetics, it was also about changing lives.

For customers, Sobella offered more than affordable lipsticks and foundations. It offered authenticity. Unlike faceless multinational brands, Sobella carried the voice of a relatable Malaysian woman who understood their struggles and aspirations. Buying Sobella felt personal. It meant supporting a local entrepreneur, believing in her dream, and being proud of a brand that spoke their language and reflected their culture.

This sense of community was reinforced by Syuhada's open gratitude. She often thanked customers directly, reminding them that their choices kept the brand alive. In doing so, she blurred the line between business and belonging. Sobella wasn't just a product on a shelf, it became a shared journey between founder, sellers, and consumers. That is Sobella's greatest strength. Competitors can copy packaging, mimic promotions, or launch trendier campaigns. But the loyalty

born from community, from people feeling truly connected to a brand's story is something far harder to replicate. And this is why Sobella continues to shine. It is not just a beauty brand. It is a living community where dreams, determination, and empowerment come together under one name, *So Beautiful, Sobella*.

### **Epilogue: More Than Just Makeup**

Sobella's journey is not simply a business case, it is a story of hope, courage, and the power of dreams. What began in a small room in Kelantan, with a young woman unsure of her future, has grown into a brand that now inspires thousands across Malaysia and beyond.

Through every milestone, from the first sales on social media, to the 500-strong agent convention, to the proud moment of winning the Superbrand Award, Sobella has shown that success is never built overnight. It is carved out of resilience, late nights, mistakes turned into lessons, and above all, an unwavering belief that tomorrow can always be better.

Yet beyond awards and numbers, Sobella's true legacy lies in its people, the mothers who found financial freedom as agents, the students who proudly wore Sobella lipsticks to campus, the women who felt beautiful without breaking their budgets, and the loyal customers who chose to support a local dream. Each of them is a chapter in the Sobella story.

For Syuhada, this is not just about selling cosmetics, it is about proving that ordinary people can achieve extraordinary things when they dare to take that first leap of faith. Sobella stands today not only as a beauty brand, but as a symbol of what is possible when passion meets perseverance. The journey is far from over. The beauty industry will keep changing, trends will rise and fall, but Sobella's heart remains the same. To make beauty accessible, to empower communities, and to remind every woman that she is, in her own way, *so beautiful*.

And perhaps, that is the most touching lesson of all, that when you believe in your dream, and nurture it with courage, your story too can inspire others.

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