

HOMEGROWN SCENT

A pioneer in its field, **HMNS** is paving the way for local perfume brands to thrive in the import-dominated perfume industry.

By **Audrea Denneisha**

Karina Innadindya and Rizky Arief Dwi Prakoso



Early in the pandemic, a tweet that compared a certain perfume to the smell of “successful ladies working in the Sudirman Central Business District area” went viral. Though unintentional and anonymous, the tweet launched a local perfume company called HMNS—pronounced “humans”—on the path to success. Many readers of the tweet went to internet markets after seeing it and started looking for the ubiquitous fruity and vanilla-scented perfume known as *Orgsm*. Particularly in large cities like Jakarta, perfumes have become an essential

part of daily life in Indonesia. However, the country also contributes significantly to the worldwide fragrance market, as numerous essential oils are produced domestically and exported worldwide. Indonesian export of essential oils exceeded \$215.81 million in 2020 according to Indonesia Eximbank Institute, with 15% of the total going to Europe to be distilled by the perfume industry. Among the various essential oils, patchouli oil is the most exported oil accounting for more than 85% of the global supply.

Even though a sizable portion of perfume ingredients come from Indonesia, foreign perfume products continue to dominate the local market, providing consumers with limited choices until a few years ago. There are three primary types of fragrances on the market: niche perfumes that cost millions of rupiahs; those bought at convenience stores; and refill perfumes supplied by street perfumers.

By creating opulent yet reasonably priced perfumes for both men and women, HMNS Perfume’s founder Rizky Arief Dwi Prakoso and his cofounders Karina Innadindya and Amron Naibaho have tried to break into the Indonesian perfume industry. The inspiration for the entire project arose from Rizky’s struggle to obtain a high quality men’s cologne as a fresh graduate. Rizky then learned that imported perfumes are costly because its components come from various manufacturers worldwide. Meanwhile, Indonesia has the required components to succeed in the market, yet unfortunately is still behind in the supply chain. Thus, Rizky, the CEO of HMNS, believes “If we can localize everything, we can manufacture items of the same or even better quality, and at a lower price.” In light of this, Rizky and Karina set out to explore the perfume industry and create a business strategy as a side project in 2017.

WIS PRAMONO FOR FORBES INDONESIA

In 2019, the duo finally decided to advance their small side project while juggling their careers as marketing consultants, marking the beginning of HMNS. They first encountered Agil Usman, a street perfumer from Bandung who had been working in the field since 1994, when they started their journey. They ultimately released their first collection of perfumes, Alpha, Beta, and Delta, based on Agil’s modified formulae, in May 2019. Although the initial three items were warmly received, HMNS didn’t reach its pinnacle until *Orgsm* was introduced later that year, and which thanks to Twitter, attracted a lot of media at-

DESTINED ENTREPRENEURS

After HMNS’s successful voyage, its founders have emerged as some of Indonesia’s most well-known young businesspeople. Each of them comes from extremely different backgrounds, despite doing well in business. Rizky is a Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB) geological engineering graduate. Amron and Karina both completed geophysical engineering bachelor’s degrees from ITB and Padjadjaran University, respectively.

Before HMNS was launched, Rizky and Karina collaborated as cofounders of the Bandung-based shoe company NAH project, which President Joko Widodo frequently wore. The two left in 2018 and began working at a consulting firm while attempting to launch HMNS. HMNS later evolved into an experimental brand where the two could test concepts before presenting them to their clients. They discovered the brand had grown larger than their clientele after months of experimenting with various marketing strategies for HMNS, which led them to decide to relocate to Jakarta at the end of 2019. Amron joined Rizky and Karina at about the same time as a cofounder and COO.

tention. “To sell a perfume online is to sell a story; we need people to understand our product (especially its scent), and Twitter was the media that delivered our message very well,” says Rizky, who also mentions that HMNS primarily uses Twitter as an electronic word-of-mouth strategy to grow its online community.

The pandemic struck just a few months after HMNS finally started to gain traction among its target audience. Masks were required for everyone, and people were forced to remain indoors, thus making perfume use less essential. However, HMNS was still able to prosper. Which even Rizky himself thinks was odd. Two changes that occurred at the time, in consumer trends and consumer behavior, can explain the anomaly. People began exploring for alternatives online because offline purchasing was becoming increasingly

constrained. Positive social media reviews also attracted new customers. To further accommodate customers, HMNS offers a starter set of three different Eau de Perfumes in a 5-ml size. As a digitally native company, HMNS was provided with new opportunities by consumers’ growing online behavior, which allowed them to flourish during the pandemic and earn over Rp3 billion in their first year.

Along with its success in the perfume industry, the pandemic also gave HMNS the impetus it needed to launch a sister brand called Home of Humans, which was established specifically for home fragrances. Seven Eau de Perfumes (EDP), two body veils of mist, three reed diffusers, and one room spray are presently available from HMNS and Home of Humans. Their latest EDP release, *Ambar Janma*, features two scents that may be stacked in a container with two sprays. *The Perfection*, a collaboration with Indonesian actor Christian Sugiono, is also among their EDP range. Each HMNS EDP product features an indigenous Indonesian component to capitalize on the country’s status as a producer of perfume ingredients, such as clove in *The Perfection* and Gayo Patchouli in *Ambar Janma*. With 15,000–20,000 products sold each month from both companies, HMNS made about Rp65 billion in the last year.

To meet the demands of more people, Rizky, Karina, and Amron have a hectic agenda ahead of them as they develop one innovation after another. They want to introduce another sibling brand called “Body of Humans,” which will create personal care items like deodorants. The “most fascinating initiative,” according to Karina, is the development of automobile perfumes as a new product. Along with emphasizing product expansion, Rizky and his team continue to look into the prospects of launching an offline store. One of these is a new semi-permanent store in Grand Indonesia that will open in the near future, and another is a strategy to penetrate duty-free shops at airports.

The popularity of HMNS has led to a change in the perfume industry. As local perfume brands draw more attention daily, acceptance of them is growing. The fact that more local perfume brands have launched in the last year doesn’t lessen HMNS’s commitment to innovation because it continues to hold its position as a leader in the industry. According to Karina, HMNS’ Chief Product Officer, “We always aim to hunt for unique and entertaining elements to work with when putting together our perfume scents since we never want to be a duplicate to another.”

Since the belief that ‘imported goods are superior’ is still very much alive, especially in the perfume industry, there are still many individuals who haven’t been persuaded to sample local scents. Rizky and Karina acknowledge that this also holds true for HMNS and that local perfumes mostly draw new customers and those looking to upgrade. It’s still work in progress, but Rizky believes it should and can happen. **F**