

*Indomie Unpacked: A Case Study on the Global Rise,  
Socioeconomic Impact, and Controversies of an Instant  
Noodle Empire*

*Putri Prameswari<sup>1</sup>*

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## Introduction

If you think of foods that have crossed cultural and geographical boundaries with striking success, instant noodles might be high on your list. Popular for their convenience, affordability, and unique ability to adapt to local palates, instant noodles now occupy kitchen shelves in countless homes worldwide. Yet one brand, in particular, seems to dominate discussions about the global instant noodle phenomenon: Indomie. Produced by an Indonesian conglomerate, this staple has carved out a formidable presence across Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and beyond, finding its way into over 100 countries<sup>2</sup>.

Alongside its impressive reach, Indomie ignites conversation—both praise and controversy. For some, it symbolizes convenience, low cost, broad flavour profiles, and even cultural nostalgia. For others, concerns over health implications have cast a shadow, especially with periodic recalls in different markets due to alleged chemical residues or evolving safety standards. Nonetheless, the brand's social footprint goes beyond just food; philanthropic initiatives such as scholarship awards in Kaduna State, Nigeria, show Indomie's philanthropic approach<sup>3</sup>. On the flip side, regulatory bodies sometimes step in when consumer fears about certain ingredients arise, as happened recently with ethylene oxide being detected in certain shipments<sup>4</sup>.

Against this backdrop, the instant noodles phenomenon—especially Indomie's role—deserves thorough examination. This paper aims to offer a balanced, data-driven exploration of

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<sup>1</sup> Putri Prameswari, a graduate researcher at Universitas Airlangga, where she explores the intersection of ethical marketing and consumer behavior. With a focus on sustainable business practices, her research bridges cultural insights and modern marketing strategies to promote integrity in Indonesia's dynamic market landscape.

<sup>2</sup> [Indomieca](#)

<sup>3</sup> [MSN](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Dailytrust](#)

Indomie's influence, focusing on consumer behaviour factors, socioeconomic developments, brand expansion strategies, health-related controversies, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and crisis management. By weaving together various sources and scholarly discussions, the paper clarifies how a simple product can become a source of both economic opportunity and public debate around health and consumer protection.

The discussion begins with a historical perspective, then shifts to analysing the product's sociocultural and economic impact. Subsequent sections delve into brand positioning, marketing practices, controversies, philanthropic efforts, and how the brand continues to be shaped by—and reshape—global consumer patterns. Through this lens, you can better understand how an instant noodle can become a near-ubiquitous household name and sometimes a source of heated debate.

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## Historical background and evolution of Indomie

Instant noodles initially gained traction in Japan in 1958, credited to Momofuku Ando, whose Cup Noodles invention revolutionized quick meals<sup>5</sup>. In Indonesia, the concept took hold in the late 1960s, but it was in 1972 that Indomie emerged, originally launched with its Chicken flavour, followed by innovations like “Mi Goreng” (fried noodles) in 1982. By pairing the fried noodle concept, which is deeply rooted in Indonesian culinary tradition, with a convenient preparation style, Indomie quickly appealed to local tastes.

Over the subsequent decades, Indomie's expansion was not confined to Indonesian borders. By developing diverse flavour offerings—ranging from regional Indonesian tastes like rendang or Soto Mie to more internationally oriented variants—the brand honed a strategy of localization wherever it went. This approach allowed Indomie to enter new markets successfully, even in regions like the Middle East, Africa, and parts of Europe, showing the product's adaptability to varying culinary preferences. Critically, Indomie's trajectory has been shaped by a combination of entrepreneurial drive and practical consumer appeal. As the brand's own portal explains, core values such as perseverance and innovation paved the way for global recognition. While the brand's beginnings in the 1970s may have been humble, the steady investment in new factories, distribution networks, and marketing campaigns reflects a calculated strategy to become a leader in the instant noodle segment worldwide.

By 2018, Indomie had gained status as one of the “Most Chosen Brands” by Kantar Worldpanel—ranking #1 in Indonesia and #8 globally. With an annual production capacity hitting roughly 19 billion packs, the brand has become emblematic of Indonesia's expertise in

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<sup>5</sup> [Batamnewsasia](#)

the instant foods market, often occupying the top-of-mind position in consumers' heads whenever the term "instant noodles" is mentioned.

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## Socioeconomic impact

### Contribution to local economies

A single product can create far-reaching socioeconomic ripples, and Indomie appears to embody that potential. As an enterprise under PT Indofood CBP Sukses Makmur, the brand's economic influence begins with local labour. Factories, distribution centres, ingredient sourcing—especially flour, packaging, and seasonings—engage diverse segments of Indonesia's workforce. An industry analysis reveals that Indofood is one of the country's biggest food manufacturers, generating thousands of jobs<sup>6</sup>.

Beyond Indonesia, Indomie's presence in countries like Nigeria has significantly bolstered local economies as well. In Nigeria, the brand has factories that produce millions of noodle packs daily, subsequently fuelling local flour production, shipping, and sales networks<sup>7</sup>. According to Tolaram Group, a partner of Indomie in Nigeria, the brand's local production processes require substantial wheat imports and, in turn, create job opportunities in allied sectors such as logistics and warehousing.

Globally, Indomie's wide distribution means local markets benefit from a stable supply of an affordable convenience product. Small neighbourhood shops (warungs in Indonesia, corner stores in Nigeria) profit from the sale of a high-demand item, thereby contributing to grassroots-level economic activity. Such widespread distribution often amplifies the brand's image as a household necessity, fuelling a cycle of supply and demand that consistently yields revenue for small and large businesses alike.

### Export and foreign exchange

Indofood CBP, which includes Indomie among its product line, reported overseas sales contributing 29% of its total sales of 64.8 trillion rupiah (about \$4.41 billion) in one recent financial year<sup>8</sup>. This highlights the broader role the product plays in Indonesia's foreign exchange earnings. For countries like Indonesia seeking to diversify export portfolios beyond raw commodities, a recognized global brand (like Indomie) becomes an advantage for foreign exchange inflows.

Meanwhile, in many African countries, Indomie's local production has minimized import reliance. In Nigeria, for instance, local factories reduce the need to import finished noodles,

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<sup>6</sup> [Batamnewsasia](#)

<sup>7</sup> [CNN](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Reuters](#)

though wheat flour is often still imported. This arrangement fosters partial self-sufficiency in essential items while curbing the outflow of foreign exchange for a final packaged good.

### Addressing socioeconomic diversity

Instant noodles are typically cost-competitive. The ability to offer a meal—though nutritionally debatable—at a price significantly lower than many traditional meal options is particularly appealing to lower-income consumers or busy families. This price-accessibility fosters debates about whether Indomie helps address immediate hunger and convenience or perpetuates reliance on lower-cost, processed foods with uncertain health profiles. Still, the brand's affordability is undeniably attractive to students, young professionals, and large households, making Indomie a popular solution for tight budgets and limited cooking facilities.

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### Consumer behaviour: Cultural, social, personal, and psychological factors

Understanding why consumers gravitate toward Indomie requires teasing out the interplay of cultural norms, social influences, personal preferences, and psychological triggers.

#### Cultural factors

When Indomie first launched in the early 1970s, its alignment with Indonesian culinary heritage was pivotal. Indonesians already consumed large amounts of noodles, so packaging them in an instant format appealed to established tastes. That cultural resonance persists: in many parts of Indonesia, “Mie Goreng” (fried noodle) is a familiar staple. Indomie simply made it more accessible. Over time, Indomie's brand presence extended beyond Indonesian culture to places like Nigeria, where locals have developed a strong attachment. It's common to see Indomie signboards across Nigerian neighbourhoods, suggesting that the brand has merged with the local food identity<sup>9</sup>.

Yet cultural affinity does not automatically free the brand from scrutiny. For instance, certain cultural groups might question the healthfulness of instant noodles, especially if fresh, home-cooked meals are deeply valued. Some families accept Indomie as an occasional convenience, but not a daily staple. According to one study on consumer behaviour at Makassar State University, cultural factors alone did not significantly predict purchase decisions for Indomie, as validated by their statistical data<sup>10</sup>. This suggests culture may be merely one slice of a multifaceted consumer logic.

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<sup>9</sup> [CNN](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Research Gate](#)

## Social and personal dimensions

Social influence often emerges from peer groups, household norms, and socioeconomic pressures. In many communities, noodles are an easy fallback meal shared among friends, and in some lower-income settings, Indomie may be provided as an affordable dish that feels more modern than purely traditional food. A friend or neighbour's positive testimonial, or even a simple habit within the household, can perpetuate consumption.

Personal factors further include age, occupation, and financial means. Young university students sometimes prefer Indomie because it requires minimal cooking skills, and it's cost-effective<sup>11</sup>. Large families might turn to Indomie when budgets are tight. Some also see it as a convenient meal for children, although health experts occasionally raise concerns about sodium or additive levels.

## Psychological motivations

Purchase decisions also arise from psychological drivers such as motivation, perception, attitudes, and beliefs. Indomie leverages a sense of nostalgia in Indonesia with taglines like "Indomie seleraku" (Indomie is my taste), reinforcing emotional bonds to the brand. In overseas markets, marketing efforts evoke comfort, convenience, or novelty. Combined with media exposure, these cues create an emotional association that influences brand loyalty, even when controversies arise.

Empirical findings from the research in Makassar highlight that psychological factors had the most dominant effect on purchase decisions. One plausible explanation is that brand reputation, memory associations, and personal satisfaction with taste carry enough emotional weight to override other concerns<sup>12</sup>. In essence, even if a segment of consumers hears about health controversies, their attachment or preference may lead them to continue purchases anyway—an intriguing demonstration of how strong brand equity can defy setbacks.

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## Brand expansion strategies and marketing tactics

### Penetrating global markets

In examining how Indomie navigated international expansion, you can see a blend of robust distribution networks, brand localization, and consistent messaging. According to the brand's

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<sup>11</sup> [Research Gate](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Research Gate](#)

own marketing statements, Indomie is now available in more than 100 countries<sup>13</sup>. The “3A” strategy—Acceptability, Availability, and Affordability—has often been cited as a guiding principle<sup>14</sup>.

1. **Acceptability (Product):** The brand invests in flavour variations to ensure the product fits local taste preferences. In Nigeria, for instance, it offers Flavors that resonate with local cuisine. In Middle Eastern markets, Indomie may emphasize Halal certifications to reassure consumers.
2. **Availability (Place):** Indomie invests in production facilities close to markets. Nigeria hosts multiple factories, ensuring that the product can reach even remote areas reliably. A strong supply chain approach, combined with strategic partnerships, ensures the noodles appear on supermarket shelves and small kiosks alike.
3. **Affordability (Price):** Pricing strategies position Indomie as an everyday meal option. Often sold in single-serve packs, the brand can cater to modest budgets while retaining enough profit margins.

### Advertising and promotions

Marketing campaigns across regions typically showcase Indomie as a convenient, tasty, and family-friendly meal. In Indonesia, it has used emotive slogans emphasizing local pride, while in Nigeria, large-scale promotions and brand ambassadors have helped Indomie outpace competitors<sup>15</sup>.

From a broader marketing perspective, it’s telling that the brand invests in more than just TV or print ads; Indomie often sponsors cooking contests, school-based feeding programs, and large-scale events to create direct consumer engagement. These promotional strategies align with integrated marketing communications, reinforcing positive brand associations beyond mere product consumption.

### The role of public relations in times of crisis

Effective public relations (PR) is key when controversies surface. A past recall labelled “killer Indomie scare” in Nigeria in 2004 tested the brand’s ability to manage rumours<sup>16</sup>. During that episode, brand managers allegedly moved slowly to clarify the situation, which initially harmed public trust. Eventually, clarifications and interventions by the Nigerian agency in charge of food regulation (NAFDAC) gave Indomie a clean bill of health. Over time, the brand regained market share by combining advertising, targeted PR, and direct community engagement.

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<sup>13</sup> [Indomieca](#)

<sup>14</sup> [IJSR](#)

<sup>15</sup> [CNN](#)

<sup>16</sup> [Abuad.edu](#)

More recently, issues about ethylene oxide in certain shipments have reemerged in Malaysia and Taiwan, prompting recalls or cautionary statements from local authorities<sup>17</sup>. The brand has responded with official statements emphasizing adherence to existing food safety standards, illustrating how public trust hinges on crisis communication.

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## Crisis management and product scares

### The notorious “Killer Indomie” scare

One of the more significant brand crises occurred in 2004, when rumours circulated in Nigeria that a young man had died after consuming Indomie. This rumour spread quickly, fuelling widespread panic and a sharp decline in sales<sup>18</sup>. Investigations by the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) eventually determined that the product was safe, linking the individual’s death to unrelated causes. Nonetheless, the brand faced an uphill battle: product retraction from shelves, public doubt, and subsequent reacquisition of trust.

Studies suggest that the brand’s initial reluctance or slow response to clarify the matter aggravated public fear<sup>19</sup>. However, once the manufacturer and relevant agencies coordinated transparent messaging, Indomie recovered, demonstrating the resilience of strong brand equity. In the aftermath, marketing public relations strategies—such as featuring credible spokespersons, offering factory tours, and stepping up engagement with local communities—helped restore confidence.

### Recalls and regulatory bans

A more recent wave of controversy involved allegations of ethylene oxide detection in a “special chicken” variety, leading to product recall requests by authorities in Malaysia and Taiwan<sup>20</sup>. In Nigeria, the local regulator (NAFDAC) banned importation of that specific variant while allowing locally made Indomie products to continue sales, emphasizing the brand is produced domestically and that only certain imports are disallowed<sup>21</sup>.

In all these instances, Indomie management responded by highlighting compliance with Codex standards for instant noodles and Indonesian National Agency for Drug and Food Control (BPOM) guidelines<sup>22</sup>. This consistent emphasis on regulatory compliance underscores the

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<sup>17</sup> [DailyTrust](#); [CNN](#)

<sup>18</sup> [Abuad.edu](#)

<sup>19</sup> [Abuad.edu](#)

<sup>20</sup> [CNN](#)

<sup>21</sup> [DailyTrust](#)

<sup>22</sup> [CNN](#)

necessity of integrated crisis management that is quick, transparent, and cooperative with local government agencies.

### **Lessons in corporate communication**

Indomie's experiences with alleged health scares underscore the importance of proactive communication and prompt crisis response. Delays can erode consumer trust, while swift engagement with the press and regulators helps contain negative fallout. Industry experts often highlight the brand's eventual pivot to thorough marketing public relations, featuring spokespersons and leveraging "town storming" or sampling events. Doing so effectively demonstrates product safety and fosters goodwill at the grassroots level<sup>23</sup>.

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## **Philanthropic initiatives and Corporate Social Responsibility**

### **Educational scholarships and community support**

Companies operating at a global scale increasingly engage in CSR strategies to bolster reputations, connect with communities, and sometimes mitigate controversies. Indomie's philanthropic undertakings include scholarship awards in Kaduna State, Nigeria, where 100 students from 10 government junior secondary schools each received financial support<sup>24</sup>. This initiative highlights how the brand attempts to address educational barriers and support young learners who might be financially disadvantaged.

Educators and parents in Kaduna have applauded these scholarships for offering "hope and encouragement," indicating that philanthropic activities can influence perceptions of a brand's goodwill. That same event also featured a "Mobile Kitchen" serving Indomie to attendees, weaving brand visibility and charity into a single occasion. On the one hand, it's an effective brand-building strategy; on the other, critics might question whether such events primarily function as marketing in disguise.

### **Beyond scholarships: Other CSR activities**

Indomie has also been reported to sponsor or donate to various local charities, host cooking demonstrations, or fund small community development initiatives in multiple regions<sup>25</sup>. These

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<sup>23</sup> [Abuad.edu](http://Abuad.edu)

<sup>24</sup> [MSNs](http://MSNs)

<sup>25</sup> [Abuad.edu](http://Abuad.edu)



broader efforts can foster consumer loyalty, since individuals in targeted communities often feel a sense of reciprocity toward a brand that invests in their welfare.

### **Ethical debates**

Despite the positive optics, philanthropic programs by major food brands sometimes raise ethical dilemmas. Is the company using CSR to offset or overshadow critical conversations around product healthfulness, environmental impact, or marketing to children? Some consumer advocacy groups would prefer to see more emphasis on improving product nutrition rather than focusing on philanthropic activities that might distract from underlying controversies<sup>26</sup>. Others, however, argue that as long as these programs genuinely assist communities, the brand's philanthropic approach is still beneficial.

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## **Health concerns and regulatory framework**

### **Nutritional profile and public perception**

Instant noodles often feature lower protein content compared to fresh protein sources and can contain high sodium levels, preservatives, and flavour enhancers. Health experts caution that excessive consumption might contribute to obesity, hypertension, or other metabolic issues<sup>27</sup>. A study referencing Baylor and Harvard University research concluded that frequent instant noodle consumption may correlate with elevated risk of certain cardiometabolic conditions.

However, brand literature counters that Indomie is made “from carefully selected ingredients, the best quality flour, and fresh spices,” often highlighting vitamins and minerals added during processing<sup>28</sup>. The reality likely lies in a grey area: Indomie can be part of a balanced meal if consumed in moderation, supplemented with vegetables, eggs, or other proteins, but not a complete substitute for a diverse, nutrient-rich diet.

### **Regulatory bodies and varying standards**

Food safety oversight varies significantly from one country to another. In Indonesia, the National Agency for Drug and Food Control (BPOM) sets guidelines for permissible additives and contaminants<sup>29</sup>. In Nigeria, NAFDAC takes on a similar role, banning imports of certain instant noodle variants while allowing local production to continue under specified regulations<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> [CNN](#)

<sup>27</sup> [Research Gate](#)

<sup>28</sup> [Indomieca](#)

<sup>29</sup> [CNN](#)

<sup>30</sup> [DailyTrust](#)

This variation in standards can mean a product deemed safe by Indonesian regulators might conflict with guidelines in Taiwan or Malaysia, as witnessed with the detection of ethylene oxide. Indeed, Indonesian authorities often note that each country's sensitivity and thresholds for chemical residues differ<sup>31</sup>. The brand's global presence means it must constantly adapt to these diverse regulations to maintain consumer trust and avoid punitive measures.

### Consumer education

Brands like Indomie often emphasize that, when cooked and consumed responsibly, noodles can form part of a balanced diet. However, consumer advocates sometimes argue that labelling should be clearer—particularly regarding sodium levels or additive warnings. Some call for more robust campaigns educating consumers on how to diversify diets, thus preventing the overconsumption of instant noodles.

Still, as economic realities drive some consumers to lean heavily on cheap meal options, addressing the tension between affordability and nutritional adequacy remains a challenge. Regulatory bodies can require transparent labelling and advise moderation, but ultimately, individual consumers and families must weigh convenience against health considerations.

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## Future outlook and key challenges

Although Indomie has weathered multiple crises and continues to dominate markets across Asia and Africa, the brand faces a range of contemporary challenges:

1. **Regulatory tightening:** As global health standards evolve, Indomie may face stricter guidelines, especially in markets sensitive to chemical traces or high additives. Ensuring compliance across multiple jurisdictions will demand ongoing vigilance.
2. **Competitive pressures:** Despite holding substantial market share, especially in Indonesia and Nigeria, Indomie contends with numerous rival instant noodle brands. In Nigeria alone, an estimated 16 brands compete<sup>32</sup>. This crowded field requires fresh marketing campaigns, new product variants, and continuous engagement.
3. **Health-conscious consumers:** A growing global movement toward healthier, fresher meals can challenge the instant noodle sector. Indomie may explore reduced-sodium lines, whole-grain variants, or additional fortification strategies to address health concerns, a path some competitors have taken.

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<sup>31</sup> [Reuters](#)

<sup>32</sup> [CNN](#)

4. **Environmental and sustainability concerns:** Instant noodles often rely on single-use plastic packaging. Coupled with palm oil usage, these realities prompt questions about deforestation, carbon footprints, and waste management. In a world paying more attention to environmental sustainability, Indomie may be compelled to adopt greener practices.
  5. **Public trust and brand reputation:** Regardless of philanthropic initiatives, controversies can undermine public confidence, particularly regarding health or product safety. Transparent communication, prompt crisis management, and ongoing consumer engagement will be crucial to maintaining trust.
  6. **Flavour innovation and localization:** Indomie thrives on its ability to tailor Flavors to local preferences. As it expands further into regions like the Middle East, Europe, or Latin America, R&D teams must keep local palates in mind while preserving the brand's recognizable taste elements.
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## Balancing brand growth with public trust for future staple

Indomie's journey from a small local Indonesian instant noodle to a global brand spanning over 100 countries illustrates the dynamic intersection of consumer behaviour, economic viability, cultural adaptation, and corporate responsibility. It has undoubtedly transformed how millions around the world approach quick, convenient meals, bridging cultural gaps and offering Flavors that can blend into diverse food cultures.

On the positive side, Indomie fosters economic growth by employing thousands, stimulating local industries, and generating export revenue. Through philanthropic actions—like scholarship programs in Nigeria's Kaduna State—it has touched communities beyond the commercial realm, illustrating a capacity for social engagement. Additionally, its marketing successes highlight how brand loyalty can transcend controversies, as loyal consumers often return even after negative rumours or recalls.

At the same time, Indomie remains at the centre of health debates, especially regarding high sodium content, certain additives, and alleged contamination issues. Regulatory agencies from Taiwan to Nigeria sometimes mandate recalls or impose bans on particular variants, underscoring how product safety standards are not uniform across borders. This patchwork of regulations can either hamper Indomie's market penetration or serve as an impetus for more rigorous quality checks. Another critical dimension is the tension between corporate social responsibility efforts and concerns about marketing to vulnerable groups, such as children or low-income communities who rely on inexpensive processed foods.

### Open Access Cases (OAC)

Consumer behaviour research reveals that while cultural familiarity helps Indomie in certain regions, the decisive factors for continued consumption lie in personal needs—budget, convenience, and psychological attachment to taste or brand identity. Indomie’s ability to embed itself into local culinary traditions while simultaneously marketing a modern, instant solution cannot be understated. Nonetheless, the brand must remain vigilant. The modern consumer is increasingly health-aware, and global competition in instant noodles is intensifying.

In looking toward the future, balancing brand growth with public trust will demand integrated strategies—from innovating healthier variants to maintaining transparent, swift crisis communication. If Indomie continues to refine production processes, invests in robust regulatory compliance, and addresses evolving consumer expectations, it can maintain its position as a formidable global brand in the instant noodle industry. Yet the brand’s resilience will be measured by its capacity to respond to health controversies, adapt to changing consumer lifestyles, and meaningfully contribute to the communities it serves.

At its core, Indomie’s story is emblematic of how a convenient and culturally resonant product can become a staple across continents—garnering devotion, facing scrutiny, and shaping narratives around food security, corporate ethics, and consumer preferences. By analysing both the triumphs and the controversies, you can see how Indomie’s global footprint represents more than just noodles in a pack; it highlights the complexities inherent in feeding an ever-growing world that yearns for faster, cheaper, and sometimes tastier solutions.

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