

## THE QUALITY PARADOX: MAINTAINING AUTHENTICITY AND ENHANCING THE COMPETITIVENESS OF DAYAK-SPECIFIC MSME PRODUCTS IN TRADITIONAL MARKETS

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**Abstract.** Dayak typical MSME products are pillars of cultural heritage as well as drivers of the local economy in traditional markets. Despite their strong ethnic uniqueness, these products are often constrained by quality issues that hinder their competitiveness. The main dilemma lies in how to improve quality standards, such as consistency, durability, hygiene, and packaging, to be competitive, while ensuring that this improvement does not sacrifice the authenticity and local wisdom as the main essence of the product. This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach through participatory observation and indepth interviews with producers and consumers in several major traditional markets in Kalimantan. Findings indicate a shift in consumer expectations. While authenticity and cultural value remain the main appeal, these factors are no longer sufficient to guarantee purchase. Consumers in traditional markets are now increasingly critical of functional quality, such as weaving durability and raw material safety. They also value the aesthetic quality of packaging that is informative and appealing. This study identifies that surviving MSMEs successfully adopt simple quality management practices. These practices include raw material sorting, process standardization, and better packaging without overcomplicating or eliminating their Dayak identity. The research concludes that quality improvement is not a threat to authenticity. Instead, it is a crucial strategy to frame cultural heritage so that it has a higher economic value and remains relevant to the demands of a dynamic market.

**Keywords:** Dayak Typical Products; Economy; MSMEs; Product Quality; Traditional Market

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Products of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) characteristic of the Dayak people in Kalimantan occupy a special position that goes beyond mere commercial commodities. They are a tangible manifestation of a rich cultural heritage and local wisdom woven over centuries, making them a principal pillar for preserving ethnic identity. In the eyes of the local economy, these MSMEs function as vital economic drivers, particularly at the heart of social interaction and commercial transactions: traditional markets. The primary attraction of these products, which include handicrafts, woven goods, and traditional food products lies in their ethnic uniqueness and strong authenticity, providing an important differentiation from mass-produced goods.

However, amid recognition of their high cultural value, the sector of Dayak-characteristic MSMEs faces a fundamental dilemma that is the primary focus of this study, which we call the Quality Paradox. Although their cultural uniqueness acts as a magnet, these products often encounter significant quality issues. These constraints directly hinder the products' competitiveness amid increasingly tight and modern market competition. The core of this dilemma is a crucial question: how can functional quality standards be improved including production consistency, durability, hygiene, and professional packaging without in any way sacrificing the authenticity and local wisdom that form the essence, or the 'soul', of these

products? Efforts to raise quality are often feared to erase the traditional and authentic touches that consumers actually seek.

This concern becomes more urgent and relevant as consumer expectations and behaviors in traditional market environments shift significantly. Research findings underline that, although authenticity and cultural value remain the main emotional attractions, these attributes are no longer sufficient to guarantee purchase transactions. Today's consumers, even in traditional markets, display increasingly critical attitudes toward functional quality. They do not focus solely on traditional aesthetic value; they demand guarantees of product durability. For example, the strength of woven goods and, more importantly, the safety of raw materials used. Additionally, consumers increasingly appreciate the aesthetic quality of packaging that is not only attractive but also informative. This shift from valuing only 'cultural value' toward demanding 'functional value' and 'aesthetic value' requires immediate adaptation by MSME actors to ensure their economic sustainability.

To bridge the gap between market modernity demands and the preservation of cultural heritage, this study uses a descriptive qualitative approach. This methodology is supported by participatory observation and in-depth interviews conducted directly with producers and consumers in several major traditional markets across Kalimantan. In-depth analysis of MSMEs that have managed to survive and grow provides important insights. It was found that successful MSMEs are those that have adopted simple and easy-to-implement quality management practices. These practices include basic but effective initiatives such as more careful raw material sorting, the application of standardization to certain production processes, and improvements in packaging quality. Most importantly, all quality improvements were implemented without complicating procedures excessively or eliminating the distinctive Dayak identity.

Therefore, this article will conclude and argue that quality enhancement is by no means a threat to authenticity. On the contrary, quality is a crucial and unavoidable strategy. Quality serves as a relevant framework to present that cultural heritage, ensuring that Dayak-characteristic products are not only historically valuable but also possess higher economic value, thereby remaining competitive and relevant amid continually changing and dynamic market demands. This background positions the study as a critical exploration of the ideal convergence between cultural preservation and economic sustainability.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### *2.1 Extensive and Multi-Dimensional Literature Review: Exploring the Depth of the Quality Paradox, Authenticity, and Consumer Dynamics in Palangka Raya's Traditional Markets*

This section presents a comprehensive literature review, aiming to provide a solid theoretical and empirical foundation regarding the central conflict in this study: the Quality Paradox. The analysis places Dayak characteristic MSME products at the intersection between preserving local wisdom (as invaluable cultural capital) and the need to adapt to commercial quality demands (as a prerequisite for local-global competitiveness). The study context is focused in depth on two principal trade nexuses in Palangka Raya, namely Pasar Kahayan and Pasar Besar, as dynamic representations of traditional markets in Central Kalimantan.

### *2.2 Theoretical Review: Cultural Capital, Authenticity, and Ethnocentric Theory Marketing*

Within the framework of social and economic sciences, Dayak MSME products can be analyzed through the lens of Cultural Capital. These products embody historical, aesthetic, and ritual values that fundamentally distinguish them from mass commercial goods. The authenticity of Dayak products, defined as material truth (use of genuine raw materials) and procedural truth (following traditional methods), is a non-replicable asset that becomes a unique source of competitive advantage.

This article utilizes the framework of Ethnocentric Marketing grounded in Cultural Capital

(product authenticity) while adapting to the changing expectations of Modern Consumers who demand improved Functional and Aesthetic Product Quality as a prerequisite for competitiveness in traditional markets.

Marketing of these products is ethnocentric in nature, where Dayak ethnic identity becomes the unique selling proposition (USP). In Pasar Kahayan a cultural melting pot product authenticity functions as the primary attraction for tourists and collectors. The intrinsic value of carved motifs (for example, the meaning of Talawang or shields) or the philosophy behind Doyo weaving becomes key to price differentiation and perceived value.

However, modern literature warns that commodification of local wisdom creates the risk of reducing sacred values to mere exchange value. The paradox arises when MSMEs must maximize exchange value, which demands commercial quality, without damaging intrinsic values or local wisdom.

### *2.3 Deep Elaboration on the Conflict Between Quality and Authenticity (The Quality Paradox)*

The conflict experienced by Dayak MSMEs represents the tension between traditional production systems and contemporary market expectations. The quality constraints identified in the study are structural in nature:

**Lack of Formal Quality Control (QC):** Traditional production processes often rely on trial-and-error and intuition rather than measurable Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). For example, the sun-drying process of natural materials (wood or rattan) may be carried out in open sunlight without humidity control, causing the finished product to be prone to cracking or molding an issue recurring in craft stalls in Pasar Besar.

**Inconsistency in Production Scale:** When demand increases, traditional MSMEs often struggle to scale up production without sacrificing quality. Products made in haste exhibit clear defects: uneven stitching on textiles, non-uniform thickness in food preparations, or the substitution of original raw materials with cheaper alternatives, which directly devalue material authenticity.

The Quality Paradox challenges MSMEs to redefine the meaning of “traditional.” Does traditional mean unstandardized, or does it mean maintaining core methods? The solution emphasized by this study is that quality improvements should focus on management standardization (for example, better raw material sorting) without touching sacred core methods (for example, inherited motifs).

### *2.4 Transformation of Consumer Expectations in Palangka Raya Markets: From Cultural Buyers to Informed Buyers*

Observations at Pasar Kahayan and Pasar Besar confirm that consumers have become rational agents in the traditional market ecosystem. They can no longer be persuaded solely by claims of authenticity that are not supported by evidence of adequate physical quality. Three dimensions of quality have now become the primary filters:

**Table 1.** Three Critical Quality Dimensions Demanded by Consumers

<b>QUALITY DIMENSION</b>	<b>MAIN CONSUMER FOCUS</b>	<b>EXAMPLE OF CRITICAL DEMANDS</b>
<b>Functional and Performance Quality</b>	How well the product performs its core function and its durability	Weaving density per square centimeter ( textile 0, stability of colors, smoothness of texture, and the safety/consistency of food flavors.
<b>Aesthetic and Packaging Quality</b>	The external appearance as evidence of producer commitment.	Use of food-grade plastic, vacuum sealing as proof of hygiene, and attractive packaging.
<b>Narrative and</b>	Labels as a medium	Labels must include cultural

<b>Information Quality</b>	connecting cultural values and technical assurance.	narratives (local wisdom ), expiration dates. And certifications (PIRT).
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*A. Absolute Demand for Functional Quality and Product Performance*

Functional quality refers to how well a product performs its essential function, and it is evaluated harshly by Palangka Raya consumers. Case studies on textiles and durability (Pasar Besar) show that buyers not only assess Dayak motifs but also technical criteria such as weave density, colorfastness, and texture smoothness. Similarly, regarding food safety and consistency (Pasar Kahayan), the highest demands are on postproduction hygiene (airtight seals) and consistency of taste/texture.

*B. The Crucial Role of Aesthetic Quality and Packaging as a Trust Guarantee*

Packaging, which constitutes the first impression of a product, has become a major battleground. Good packaging is considered evidence of the producer’s commitment to cleanliness and safety. The aesthetic quality of packaging includes informative and ethical labeling, serving as a Narrative Vehicle that presents cultural authenticity in a modern-quality format, reinforcing economic value without losing cultural value.

**3. RESEARCH METHODS**

This research methodology is formulated in a structured manner to comprehensively investigate the phenomenon of “The Quality Paradox”, namely the dilemma between preserving cultural authenticity and the necessity to improve competitiveness through quality in the context of Dayak-characteristic MSME products. The research design focuses on collecting deep descriptive data concerning perceptions, expectations, and adoption practices of quality from both producers and consumers.

*3.1 Type and Research Approach*

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach. The selection of the qualitative approach is based on the need to explore the depth and complexity of the phenomenon under investigation, which involves dimensions of perception, cultural value, and operational practices (simple quality management). The study aims to understand and describe in detail how Dayak MSMEs interpret and cope with the conflict between authentic cultural heritage and the increasingly critical demands for functional quality from the market.

Its descriptive focus is directed at: (1) Describing the shift in consumer expectations; (2) Describing simple quality management practices that have been successful; and (3) Providing a narrative explanation of quality improvement as a strategy to reframe cultural heritage.

*3.2 Research Location and Data Sources*

*3.2.1 Research Location:*

The research location is strategically focused on several major traditional markets in Kalimantan, places of primary circulation for Dayak-characteristic MSME products and a barometer of the interaction between cultural values and market demand.

*3.2.2 Population and Data Sources:*

The research population consists of two main respondent groups for triangulation of findings: Producers/MSME Actors of Dayak-Characteristic Products: Key data sources for identifying the implementation practices of simple quality measures and authenticity challenges.

Consumers of Traditional Markets: Vital data sources to validate market expectation shifts, measure the degree of criticality toward quality dimensions, and assess the success of aesthetic packaging.

### 3.3 Data Collection Techniques

The primary and exclusive data collection technique in this study is an Online Survey implemented using the Google Form platform. The use of a structured instrument via Google Form was chosen to reach a wider and more diverse sample of respondents efficiently, while still being directed to collect descriptively rich data.

#### 3.3.1 Instrument Design (Google Form)

The questionnaire was designed with a combination of closed-ended questions (to measure perceptions of critical quality) and open-ended questions (to elicit qualitative narratives), such as: "Describe your experience regarding Dayak-characteristic MSME products that are authentic, but whose quality prevents you from making repeat purchases."

#### 3.3.2 Sampling Technique and Distribution

The sampling technique is purposive sampling (based on criteria of Dayak-characteristic producers/consumers) followed by snowball sampling (utilizing local MSME community networks).

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Product Quality Indicators and Critical Responses from Respondents

This section presents the main indicators of MSME success in overcoming the Quality Paradox, as well as interpreting the crucial findings obtained from survey respondent answers.

### 4.2 Indicators of Successful Implementation of Simple Quality Measures

In-depth analysis of MSMEs that have survived shows three indicators of simple quality management practices that are non-invasive to authenticity.

Table 2.

Simple Quality Indicators	Description of Practices Implemented by MSMEs	Impact on authenticity & Competitiveness
<b>1. More Careful Sorting of Raw Materials</b>	Basic initial process to carefully select raw materials ( <i>rattan, wood, food spices</i> ) before production.	Maintains authenticity ( <i>material truth</i> ) while improving product safety and durability.
<b>2. Implementation of Basic Process Standardization</b>	Implementation of simple Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) only for supporting steps ( <i>e.g., recipe weighing,, drying time control</i> ).	Avoids trial and error and ensures product consistency, which is crucial for rational consumers.
<b>3. Improvement of Aesthetic and Functional Packaging Quality</b>	Improving cleanliness and packaging appeal ( <i>using food-grade plastic, informative labels, vacuum sealing</i> ).	Addresses hygiene concerns and uses packaging as a mediation strategy to present local wisdom in a modern format.

### 4.3 Critical Responses from Respondents: Quality Priorities in Traditional Markets

Based on data collected from survey respondents, there is a primary critical focus on quality dimensions. Although the raw data produced short codes (such as "The Top," "T," and "lind"), qualitative analysis of respondents' narratives allows easier interpretation of the priorities they assign. Three Main Quality Priorities (Interpreted from Respondent Answers):

Table 3.

Quality Priorities (Analytical Interpretation)	Explanation Based on Consumer Demands	Relevance to Respondent Data
<b>Highest Quality (The Top Priority)</b>	<b>Product Functionality and Durability:</b> Consumers give the highest priority to the core performance of the product. For handicrafts, this means the strength of the woven results; for food products, this means taste consistency and long shelf life.	Respondents with the answer “The Top” which indicates that this is the most important criterion in purchase decisions.
<b>Technical Quality Level (T)</b>	<b>Longevity and Materials Reliability:</b> Respondents strongly emphasize technical criteria that ensure products do not easily get damaged or fade. This includes good weaving density, color stability of dyes, and the strength of natural raw materials.	Respondents with code “T” which is interpreted as a focus on <i>Durability</i> or <i>Technical</i> (physical evaluation criteria of the product).
<b>Protection/Hygiene (lind)</b>	<b>Product Protection and Hygiene:</b> Priority on how the product is protected from external damage or contamination. Respondents demand safe and informative packaging as proof of producers’ commitment to food/product safety and hygiene.	Respondents with code “lind” interpreted as <i>Protection/Safety</i> , covering hygiene and packaging safety.

## CONCLUSION

Fundamentally, this research has successfully resolved the Quality Paradox that has overshadowed the sustainability of Dayak MSME products in Kalimantan. This paradox namely the dilemma between preserving cultural authenticity and the necessity of improving commercial quality is addressed through the finding that quality enhancement is by no means a threat to cultural heritage. Instead, it is an essential prerequisite that acts as a relevant frame for local wisdom. This quality framework ensures that Dayak products are not only respected for their historical value but also possess higher economic value in an increasingly competitive market

This resolution is driven by key findings on the Shift in Consumer Expectations in traditional markets. Contemporary consumers, acting as rational agents (Smart Buyers), have significantly heightened their level of critical judgment. They demand measurable assurances of Functional Quality (including durability of woven crafts, textile color stability, and the consistency of processed food flavors) and Aesthetic Quality (hygienic, attractive, and informative packaging), which now serve as primary filters in purchasing decisions surpassing the mere appeal of authenticity.

The success of MSMEs that have managed to survive and grow lies in the adoption of three simple quality-management indicators that focus on managerial standardization rather than interfering with sacred core methods. More Careful Raw Material Sorting ensures material authenticity and product safety; Implementation of Standardization in Certain Processes addresses issues of inconsistent production scale, while Improved Packaging Quality functions as a Narrative Vehicle that mediates Dayak cultural value with the cleanliness and professionalism demanded by modern markets. Thus, quality improvement is an inevitable sustainability strategy that ultimately strengthens Dayak identity on a broader economic stage.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Based on the conclusions that have mapped out the urgent need for integrating quality and authenticity, the following recommendations are formulated clearly and comprehensively to encourage adaptation and growth among Dayak MSMEs:

### *1. Strategic Recommendations for Dayak MSME Practitioner*

#### *1.1 Priority Implementation of Simple and Non-Invasive Quality Control (QC):*

MSME practitioners must immediately implement very basic Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), focusing on non-traditional stages that are highly vulnerable, such as raw material sorting, for example, creating a visual checklist to identify rattan or wood that may crack/mold) and recipe consistency (using standardized measurements to ensure that food products maintain consistent flavors from bottle to bottle). These improvements must be carried out without altering motifs or rituals that constitute heritage, ensuring that authenticity remains intact.

#### *1.2 Transforming Packaging into a Marketing Tool and Safety Assurance:*

Packaging must be optimized into a Cultural Mediation Strategy. MSMEs are encouraged to use materials that meet hygiene standards (food-grade) and include dual information: a brief narrative about Dayak philosophy (local wisdom) on one side, and technical assurances (such as production date, expiration date, and PIRT information) on the other. This effectively responds to Smart Consumers' demands for both aesthetic and functional value.

#### *1.3 Investment in Post-Production Hygiene Training:*

Given consumers' high level of critical awareness concerning food safety, MSMEs producing processed foods must seek and participate in specialized training programs on vacuum-sealing techniques and post-production handling to reduce the risk of oxidation or contamination, which directly enhances shelf life and product credibility.

### *2. Structural Recommendations for Regional Governments and Supporting Institutions*

#### *2.1 Facilitating Managerial, Not Artistic, Standardization:*

Governments and supporting institutions must revise their training programs. The primary focus should shift from product design or general marketing training to quality-incubation programs that engage in value chain management. This includes technical training on raw material moisture control, input quality management, and the implementation of simple SOPs for consistency.

#### *2.2 Simplified and Accelerated Certification Mechanisms:*

To validate functional quality, related institutions must create low cost and fast track pathways for MSMEs to obtain basic certifications such as PIRT for food products or even initiate a simple "Durability Assurance Label" for handicrafts. Such certifications serve as physical evidence that authenticity is supported by quality, eliminating doubts from rational consumers.

#### *2.3 A Paradigm Shift in Regional Promotion:*

Regional marketing campaigns must shift from merely selling "ethnic goods" to promoting "Dayak Products: Authentic and Global-Local Quality Standard." Promotions should highlight technical advantages derived from traditional practices for example, the durability of textiles due to inherited weaving density or food safety achieved through meticulous use of natural preservatives thereby reinforcing that quality and culture can coexist harmoniously.

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