



From Awareness-Raising to Business Decisions: Brand Differentiation and Positioning of MSMEs Around the Sungai Suci Tourist Attraction in Central Bengkulu

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Article Info:

Abstract

Keywords:

Differentiation;
Brand Positioning;
MSMEs;
Community Empowerment;
Destination-linked Products;

Article History:

Received : 21-03-2025

Revised : 08-06-2025

Accepted : 15-06-2025

Article DOI :

<https://doi.org/10.70550/sowel.v2i2.312>

Micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) located near tourist destinations need recognizable product identities to compete and connect with the places where they operate. This study examines product characteristics and marketing constraints among MSMEs around the Sungai Suci tourism area in Central Bengkulu, Indonesia. It also explores how a Unique Selling Proposition (USP)-based extension programme helps participants formulate product differentiation, brand positioning, and packaging concepts. An evaluative descriptive-qualitative approach drew on observation, group discussions, extension activities, simulations, and documentation of product concepts. The analysis indicates differences between business groups: producers of modified cassava flour (mocaf) had a potential local attribute to communicate but lacked consistent packaging, whereas producers of more common cassava snacks still needed to define credible points of difference. Internal barriers included limited marketing and packaging knowledge, capital, and confidence; external barriers included market access and weak integration with destination promotion. The documented outcomes were participants' initial differentiation ideas, intended brand positions, and draft packaging concepts, rather than verified changes in sales or visitor behaviour. The study offers a Positioning-Differentiation-Brand (PDB)-based empowerment framework linking extension knowledge to proposed business decisions; its destination-promotion propositions require further empirical testing.

How to cite : Adhrianti, L., Alfarabi, A., & Yuliati, Y. (2025). From Awareness-Raising to Business Decisions: Brand Differentiation and Positioning of MSMEs Around the Sungai Suci Tourist Attraction in Central Bengkulu. *Journal of Social Welfare and Community Development*, 2(2), 92-110. <https://doi.org/10.70550/sowel.v2i2.312>



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INTRODUCTION

Regional tourism depends not only on attractive destinations but also on the local experiences that visitors can recognize, remember, and take home. Culinary products,

snacks, crafts, packaging, local stories, and visual identity can all form part of that experience. Micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) occupy an important position at the intersection of household economic activity and destination identity. When local products communicate their distinctive characteristics consistently, they may become more than commercial goods: they may also introduce the place from which they originate.

Sungai Suci, located in Pondok Kelapa District, Central Bengkulu Regency, is a coastal tourism area situated relatively close to Bengkulu City. The activity records describe a distance of approximately 22 kilometres from the city centre and a journey of about 30 minutes. Although this accessibility provides an opportunity to develop tourism-related economic activity, locally produced goods have not yet become a consistently recognizable expression of the destination. Households around the area produce snacks and processed foods, while stalls near the attraction sell ready-to-eat dishes, instant noodles, crackers, chips, and packaged beverages. Many of these products remain generic and do not visibly convey a connection with Sungai Suci or Bengkulu.

The extension documentation nevertheless identifies a productive basis for differentiation. Community members process cassava into modified cassava flour (mocaf), cassava chips, crackers, and rengginang; fish-based products are also mentioned. Some products already carry brand labels, yet their packaging is basic. Participants discussed financial limitations, unfamiliarity with packaging alternatives, and uncertainty about how to develop product presentation and promotion. The principal issue is therefore not simply a lack of products, but a limited ability to communicate the differences that could make existing products meaningful to customers and visitors.

In competitive markets, consumers encounter functional similarities among products and may also consider origin, appearance, perceived quality, stories, and place associations. MSME operators therefore need to answer three related questions: what distinguishes the product, why should a visitor choose it, and what should the visitor remember about the brand? These questions matter for tourism promotion because locally associated products may carry information about a place beyond the visit itself. Bungin (2015) identifies tourism marketing as an essential component of tourism activity, alongside destinations, transportation, and resources.

Positioning, differentiation, and branding provide a useful marketing foundation for addressing this challenge. Kartajaya and Yuswohady (2005) treat them as interrelated components: differentiation concerns meaningful attributes of an offering, positioning concerns the place an offering seeks to occupy in consumers' minds, and the brand communicates the value connecting the two. Attractive packaging without a credible distinction may amount to little more than a cosmetic change; a distinctive product without clear positioning may also remain difficult to recognize.

The Unique Selling Proposition (USP) approach offers a practical starting point for small producers. Rather than instructing participants simply to create more attractive labels, the extension programme encouraged them to consider which product attributes could justify a purchase decision: raw materials, production methods, taste, utility, local origin, or an authentic product story. Those attributes could then be translated into differentiation, a proposed market position, and a consistent package or brand message.

Previous work provides useful but incomplete guidance. Puspita et al. (2018) emphasize the need for a distinctive proposition in Bengkulu tourism communication. Hidayat et al. (2011) and Indra and Lestari (2009) underscore the role of marketing communication and promotional effectiveness in the development of smaller enterprises. Studies of food souvenirs have associated product uniqueness, authenticity, taste, and

value with tourist satisfaction (Suhartanto et al., 2018), while research on local food imagery discusses links with destination loyalty (Çetin & Akar Şahingöz, 2025). However, these consumer-side findings do not show how producers in developing destinations learn to identify and communicate meaningful product attributes.

Other studies have examined participatory place branding and packaging workshops in tourism villages (Murti et al., 2023; Sabda et al., 2026), but the production of design concepts is not equivalent to their adoption in business practice. Research on community participation in destination marketing, including evidence from Bengkulu, has focused largely on destination management and stakeholder coordination rather than MSME products as carriers of destination identity (Darmanto et al., 2024; Lawelai et al., 2024). This distinction defines the present research gap: how can marketing knowledge acquired through extension be translated into product-level differentiation, intended positioning, and practical design choices, and which proposed contributions to destination promotion remain untested?

The Sungai Suci programme provides an appropriate setting for examining that question. The initial documentation includes product labels and packaging, group discussions, and a proposed redesign for cassava flour. These artefacts make it possible to assess what participants discussed and designed, without assuming that the designs were adopted or that economic outcomes improved. The study accordingly addresses three questions: (1) What product characteristics and marketing constraints shape MSMEs' needs for differentiation and brand positioning around Sungai Suci? (2) How was USP applied through extension and mentoring to support the formulation of differentiation and intended brand positions? (3) How might locally linked product and packaging concepts contribute to destination promotion, and what evidence would be needed to demonstrate that contribution?

The objectives are to characterize local products and marketing barriers, explain the practical use of USP within the Positioning–Differentiation–Brand (PDB) framework, and evaluate the observed design concepts and their potential relevance for Sungai Suci tourism communication. The contribution is an empowerment-oriented interpretation of PDB that follows the movement from marketing knowledge to tentative business decisions. The possible connection between product identity and destination promotion is explicitly formulated as a proposition for future testing, not as an established programme outcome.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Positioning–Differentiation–Brand as the Theoretical Foundation

This study uses Kartajaya's Positioning–Differentiation–Brand (PDB) framework to interpret the development of product identity among MSMEs operating near Sungai Suci. The framework brings together the strategic choice of how a product should be perceived, the attributes that make such a position credible, and the brand expression that communicates them.

Kartajaya (2004) describes positioning as building a credible place in consumers' minds. For local MSMEs, this means deciding whether a product should be recognized simply as an everyday snack or as a product associated with the people, ingredients, and tourism identity of Sungai Suci. Differentiation concerns the attributes supporting that intended association. Kartajaya and Yuswohady (2005) describe differentiation through content (what is offered), context (how it is presented), and infrastructure (what sustains delivery). For the participating enterprises, these could include cassava ingredients,

product origin, packaging, brand names, consistent labelling, and access to reliable production resources. Branding then serves as a recognizable expression of value rather than only a name or decorative label.

PDB should be understood as a coherent relationship among decisions, not a sequence of visual design tasks. Claims about local uniqueness must be credible, the intended market position must be clear, and brand elements should consistently communicate the actual product. A new package is therefore a possible output of differentiation and positioning work, rather than evidence that a product has acquired a stronger market position.

Community Empowerment: From Marketing Knowledge to Business Decisions

PDB was developed primarily as a business strategy framework. To apply it to community extension, it must be connected to the process through which participants acquire knowledge and attempt to put that knowledge to use. Scheyvens (1999) distinguishes economic, psychological, social, and political dimensions of empowerment. Economic opportunities and the confidence to express local value are especially pertinent here; however, neither should be inferred solely from attendance at a training activity.

Cohen and Levinthal (1990) argue that the value of new knowledge depends on the ability to recognize, absorb, and apply it. In household enterprises, application can be influenced by business experience, capital, available skills, and external support. The present study therefore interprets empowerment through four analytically distinct layers: (1) marketing knowledge, (2) capability to apply concepts to an existing product, (3) proposed or enacted business decisions, and (4) possibilities for collective action. The distinction between proposed and enacted decisions is essential because the source records contain draft choices and designs but do not establish later market adoption.

Table 1 translates the PDB framework into questions that MSME operators can use when developing their products. The examples are programme-specific possibilities rather than verified commercial achievements.

Table 1. Translating PDB elements into MSME business decisions

PDB element	Guiding business question	Illustrative Sungai Suci application
Differentiation: content	Which product attribute is distinct and meaningful to customers?	Emphasizing locally sourced cassava and community producers.
Differentiation: context	How should that attribute be communicated?	Using an origin story, product name, or visuals linked to Pasar Pedati or Sungai Suci.
Differentiation: infrastructure	What is needed to sustain the distinction?	Reliable packaging specifications, accurate labels, regulatory compliance, and production capacity.
Positioning	For whom, and as what, should the product be recognized?	Presenting an appropriate product as a potential Sungai Suci souvenir rather than a generic snack.
Brand and packaging	How should the intended position appear consistently?	A mocaf label identifying the producer group and product origin.

Source: Adapted from Kartajaya (2004), Kartajaya and Yuswohady (2005), Scheyvens (1999), and activity documentation

Unique Selling Proposition as a Diagnostic Tool

A Unique Selling Proposition (USP) expresses the particular reason a buyer might choose one product over similar alternatives. In the extension programme, USP served as a practical diagnostic tool for identifying attributes that could support credible differentiation. Novelty did not have to mean inventing an entirely new product: a meaningful distinction might derive from ingredients, preparation, producer identity, product history, origin, or a verifiable practical benefit.

For example, cassava-based mocaf could be presented not simply as cassava flour but as a product associated with local producers in Pasar Pedati. This would require care: a participant's view that a product is unique to the village cannot be treated as proof that comparable products do not exist elsewhere. The task is to turn real and verifiable attributes into a coherent communication proposition.

Product Differentiation and Brand Positioning

Differentiation is more than visible variation. It requires attributes that customers can recognize as meaningful. For MSMEs near a tourism destination, potentially relevant attributes include local raw materials, flavours, production techniques, verified provenance, branding, and packaging. Positioning concerns how those attributes are intended to be perceived in a particular customer segment.

The same cassava product might be positioned as an everyday ingredient, a locally produced household staple, or an appropriate regional gift. Such choices have implications for messaging, brand design, labelling, price, and sales channels. Kartajaya's (2004) emphasis on credible positioning cautions against communicating claims of uniqueness that have not been substantiated.

Packaging as a Medium of Brand and Destination Communication

Packaging protects products but also communicates names, origin, ingredients, visual character, and quality-related information. It is often the first point of contact between a local product and a visitor who does not know the producer. Consistent design can therefore help communicate a brand's intended position; it cannot, by itself, establish quality, authenticity, willingness to pay, or destination loyalty.

In the tourism context, a product label that accurately references Sungai Suci or Bengkulu may carry place-related messages beyond the original sales location. This idea is consistent with Bungin's (2015) discussion of tourism marketing and Puspita et al.'s (2018) focus on distinctive destination propositions. Its effectiveness, however, must be tested through customer and visitor evidence.

Previous Studies and Research Position

The literature relevant to this programme can be grouped into four strands. The first examines local-food souvenirs and destination-related consumer experiences. Suhartanto et al. (2018) identify brand and packaging, uniqueness, quality, authenticity, and taste/value as dimensions of food souvenirs, while finding that uniqueness, authenticity, and taste/value are especially important for satisfaction. Suhartanto (2018) associates souvenir-shopping satisfaction with destination image and loyalty. Birch and Memery (2020), however, point to an intention-behaviour gap in local-food purchases, including distribution constraints and consumer uncertainty about product origin. The studies indicate that an appealing local identity must be backed by credible attributes and actual availability.

The second strand concerns participatory identity development in tourism villages. Murti et al. (2023) report community participation in the creation of place-branding

elements in Tinalah Tourism Village, alongside differing commercial interests among MSMEs. Sabda et al. (2026) describe weaknesses in packaging and brand consistency among enterprises in Cibanten Tourism Village and the production of draft packaging and promotional materials. These contributions support participatory design but do not demonstrate sustained adoption of the resulting concepts by individual businesses.

The third strand addresses packaging cues and consumer behaviour. Suci et al. (2022), using an online experiment with 483 participants, find that packaging designs can produce different willingness-to-pay responses even where product appeal and purchase intention are similar. This cautions against assuming that traditional or place-related imagery necessarily increases commercial value.

The fourth strand examines community involvement in place marketing. Correia et al. (2022) highlight limited local stakeholder involvement in territorial brand communication. Lawelai et al. (2024) identify awareness of economic opportunity as a driver of participation in sustainable destination marketing. In Bengkulu, Darmanto et al. (2024) discuss constraints involving stakeholder coordination and institutional arrangements. These studies help explain why MSME branding may need coordination beyond the individual producer.

The present study bridges these strands by focusing on the producer-side learning process at a developing destination. It does not test tourist perceptions or destination performance; rather, it identifies the intermediate steps through which extension discussions lead to differentiated product ideas, positioning statements, and draft packaging. Table 2 situates that contribution in the existing literature.

Table 2. Synthesis of Previous Research and the Present Study

Study	Context and method	Main finding	Unaddressed issue relevant here
Suhartanto et al. (2018)	252 domestic tourists in Bandung; survey	Food-souvenir uniqueness, authenticity, and taste/value matter for satisfaction.	Does not explain how producers develop these attributes.
Suhartanto (2018)	192 domestic tourists in Bandung; PLS-SEM	Souvenir-shopping satisfaction relates to destination image and loyalty.	Focuses on buyers rather than product identity creation.
Birch & Memery (2020)	Tourists; survey	Local-food purchase intentions may not become behaviour because of access and trust issues.	Does not develop small-producer branding practice.
Çetin & Akar Şahingöz (2025)	Visitors to Istanbul and Antalya; SEM	Food image and local-food consumption values relate to loyalty.	Focuses on established destinations and tourists.
Murti et al. (2023)	Tinalah Tourism Village; participatory FGD	Community members formulate place-branding elements.	Enterprise-level adoption is not assessed.
Sabda et al. (2026)	Cibanten Tourism Village; community workshop	Produces initial packaging and promotional concepts.	Does not establish sustained market adoption.
Suci et al. (2022)	483 respondents; online experiment	Packaging cues affect willingness to pay.	Not tied to a specific tourism destination.
Correia et al. (2022)	Bragança, Portugal; mixed methods	Local stakeholders have limited involvement in territorial-brand communication.	MSME products are not the main analytical unit.

Study	Context and method	Main finding	Unaddressed issue relevant here
Lawelai et al. (2024)	136 Wakatobi residents; PLS	Economic-opportunity awareness supports active participation.	Does not investigate individual product brands.
Darmanto et al. (2024)	Bengkulu tourism villages; qualitative	Tourism marketing is constrained by coordination and governance.	Does not focus on product-to-place identity.
Present study	Sungai Suci; descriptive evaluation of extension records	Links USP, PDB, and documented design decisions; formulates tourism propositions.	Destination-related effects await empirical testing.

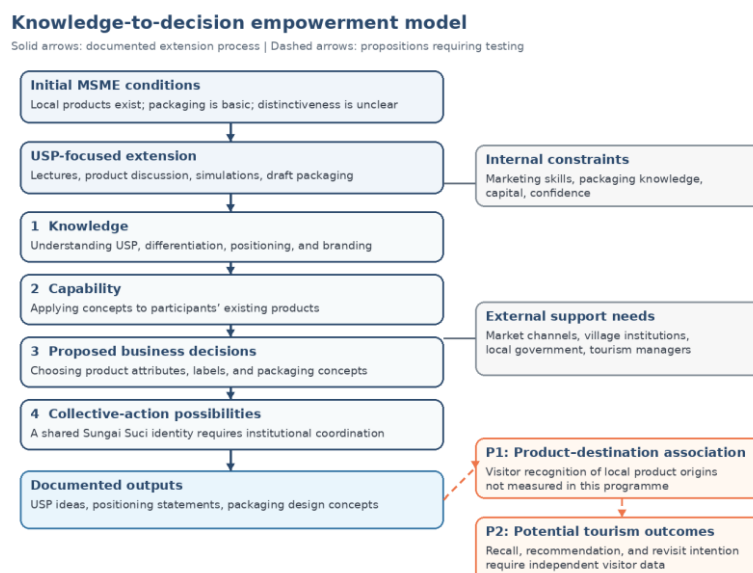
Source: Synthesized from the studies cited in the manuscript

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual model combines PDB with a layered understanding of community empowerment (Figure 1). The starting point is the documented condition of MSME products and packaging. Participants then discuss USP and apply the resulting concepts to potential differentiation, intended positioning, and draft labels. Knowledge, capability, proposed business decisions, and possibilities for collective action are analytically distinct. Internal barriers and external support requirements may interrupt the transition between those stages.

Two propositions extend beyond the documented programme outcomes. P1 proposes that locally grounded product distinctions, communicated consistently through credible branding, may make products more readily associated with Sungai Suci among visitors. P2 proposes that such product–destination associations could contribute to destination recall, recommendations, or revisit intentions. Neither proposition was evaluated in the present activity. Testing would require visitor surveys, brand-recall measures, sales records, and destination-related indicators.

Figure 1. PDB-based MSME Empowerment Model and Propositions for Destination Promotion



Source: Developed from Kartajaya (2004), Kartajaya and Yuswohady (2005), Scheyvens (1999), Cohen and Levinthal (1990), and the extension records

METHODS

Research Design and Approach

This study employed an evaluative descriptive-qualitative approach embedded in a community extension programme. The objective was not to estimate causal relationships statistically but to document the conditions of local MSME products, provide marketing-communication guidance, facilitate the formulation of possible USPs and intended brand positions, and evaluate initial product and packaging concepts. The analytical perspective combined USP as a practical diagnostic device with PDB as the conceptual framework for interpreting the proposed decisions.

The study treats the programme as a bounded community-empowerment activity. Consequently, evidence of discussion and draft designs is distinguished from verified learning gains, implementation of business decisions, commercial performance, and changes in tourists' behaviour.

Location and Target Group

The activity took place with residents of neighbourhood unit RT 3, Pasar Pedati Village, near the Sungai Suci tourism area in Pondok Kelapa District, Central Bengkulu Regency, Indonesia. Participants were existing household producers and residents interested in developing MSMEs, particularly food-related businesses. Products discussed included mocaf, cassava chips, crackers or rengginang, and fish-based processed foods. The original activity documentation does not provide a reliable total number of participants or counts by business group; therefore, no sample size or group proportions are estimated.

For qualitative comparison, the records were organized into four indicative business categories: mocaf producers with existing labels; producers of cassava-based snacks; makers or sellers of fish-based products mentioned in the records; and prospective entrepreneurs who had not yet established a branded product. These are analytical categories used to discuss differing support needs, not verified lists of individually counted participants. Because the documentation is limited for fish-based products, the specific difficulties attributed to that category remain undetermined.

Programme Stages

The programme began with a review of local products, packaging practices, and stated marketing needs. Discussions identified concerns regarding capital, general business knowledge, technology use, packaging choices, promotion, and marketing networks. The extension team then introduced marketing communication, USP, product differentiation, and positioning through presentations, examples, and visual references.

Participants subsequently discussed their products' possible distinguishing attributes, including ingredients, production processes, functions, local stories, and geographic associations. They were encouraged to identify the position they wanted customers to associate with each product and to express that position through a suitable brand name or packaging concept. Examples of Bengkulu products and videos showing packaging approaches used elsewhere were provided for reference. In the final stage, participants proposed product and packaging ideas, which were discussed and reviewed with the facilitators. The records do not establish whether each design was subsequently produced, sold, or adopted.

Data Collection and Analysis

Primary material consisted of activity observations, discussions and questions raised by participants, the products examined, initial brand and packaging concepts, and photographic documentation. Secondary material included the programme records and the marketing, MSME, and tourism literature used to interpret the activity. The evidence was organized thematically around initial product conditions, perceived USP, differentiation, intended positioning, packaging concepts, destination-related identity, and obstacles to implementation.

The first research question was addressed by comparing observed products, packaging, participant discussions, and marketing constraints. The second was examined through the extension process, simulations, and emerging differentiation and positioning ideas. The third was considered by assessing whether the documented concepts incorporated place-related attributes or could plausibly be adapted for tourism communication. Statements about destination promotion were kept separate from observed outputs.

Barriers were classified as internal when they primarily concerned producers' resources or capabilities, including knowledge, financial resources, and confidence. External barriers included market-channel access, coordination with local institutions, and links with destination promotion. Access to finance cuts across both categories: insufficient funds can be an internal limitation, whereas available funding mechanisms depend on outside institutions. Interpretations were cross-checked with the descriptions and visual records available in the source manuscript, without assigning unsupported frequencies or statistical effects.

Table 3. Indicators and Evidence Boundaries for Programme Evaluation

Dimension	Indicator	Evidence source	Permissible interpretation
Initial product condition	Product type, characteristics, packaging, marketing obstacles	Products, discussions, documentation	Identifies support needs.
USP understanding	Ability to discuss possible distinctive attributes	Discussions and simulations	Qualitative indication of conceptual engagement.
Differentiation	Proposed meaningful product attributes	Simulations and drafts	Emerging product distinction; not market validation.
Brand positioning	Proposed customer association or product position	Discussions and drafts	Intended positioning; not consumer perception.
Packaging development	Selection of format or draft design	Design concepts	Application in a design proposal; not confirmed use.
Local identity	Reference to Sungai Suci or Bengkulu	Discussions and concepts	Possible place-related communication.
Business-group variation	Product category and branding stage	Products and records	Qualitative comparison without group counts.
Barriers	Internal capabilities and external market/institutional issues	Discussions and records	Basis for assigning follow-up support.
Sales/visitor impact	Turnover, sales volumes, recall, tourist visits	Not available	No impact conclusion is possible.

Source: Developed from the programme evaluation framework and PDB.

Evaluation Boundaries

The source records did not include a structured pretest–posttest, a participant-level scoring rubric, complete attendance counts, or verified data on turnover, profit, sales volumes, visitor perceptions, brand recall, or tourist arrivals after the activity. Accordingly, findings are confined to the qualitative outcomes of discussion and design work. Expressions such as “improvement in sales,” “stronger tourist loyalty,” or “increased visits” would go beyond the evidence and are not used as conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The extension activity engaged residents of RT 3, Pasar Pedati Village, in discussions about MSME development near Sungai Suci. Products brought into the discussion were predominantly household food products, including processed cassava and mocaf, as well as fish-based products mentioned in the activity account. Observations suggested that productive activity was already present, but product identities and packaging communication needed further attention. Some products had labels, whereas others relied on ordinary packaging with few distinguishing elements.

The programme proceeded through lectures, product discussions, USP identification, simulated differentiation and positioning, and proposed package designs. Participants were invited to consider how their products might be recognized and what information could establish a credible place connection. The clearest documented design output concerned cassava flour/mocaf labelling. Table 4 synthesizes these activity-level observations; Figures 2 and 3 preserve photographic evidence from the original documentation.

Table 4. Summary of Documented Extension Outcomes

Dimension	Documented observation	Interpretation
Available products	Locally processed cassava products and other household foods were discussed.	A productive basis for identity development already exists.
Packaging	Some products had labels but presentation remained basic.	Visual communication could be strengthened.
USP awareness	Participants discussed distinctive attributes and local origin.	Initial engagement with the USP concept was evident.
Differentiation	Mocaf and some local foods were considered potential locally associated products.	Candidate attributes were identified, not externally verified.
Positioning	Participants discussed how their products should be recognized.	Intended positions began to take shape.
Packaging concepts	Draft designs and packaging ideas were produced.	Design-stage application was documented.
Tourism communication	Potential references to Sungai Suci/Bengkulu were considered.	The promotional connection remains a proposition.
Market performance	No verified post-activity sales or visitor data were recorded.	Economic and tourism effects cannot be inferred.

Source: Synthesized from the Community Extension Records

Figure 2. Existing products and packaging observed among participating MSMEs



Source: Original community extension documentation; product labels appear in their original language

The relative difficulty of differentiation varied with product type and branding stage. Mocaf producers already had a plausible locally grounded product story and examples of labelling; they primarily needed credible positioning and packaging consistency. Producers of common cassava snacks faced an earlier challenge: identifying distinctive attributes that would give a packaging redesign substance. Residents without an established product needed support beginning with product selection and USP. The available record of fish-based products was too limited for a defensible diagnosis of their specific positioning or packaging difficulties (Table 5).

Table 5. Differentiation and Positioning Needs by Indicative Business Group

Business group	Documented product/brand condition	Main support need	PDB stage
Mocaf producers	Cassava-based flour with an existing label and a later draft design; local origin identified as a candidate attribute.	Check the credibility of origin claims and achieve consistent communication.	Positioning; brand/packaging.
Cassava snack producers	Chips, crackers, and rengginang in familiar categories; some labels and simple packaging.	Identify a meaningful difference before changing visual presentation.	USP identification; differentiation.
Fish-based product producers	Fish products are mentioned, but detailed packaging and branding records are insufficient.	Specific barriers cannot be established from the available evidence; follow-up assessment is needed.	Undetermined from current documentation.
Prospective entrepreneurs	Interest in starting a business, without an established branded offering.	Clarify the product idea, target buyers, and a credible USP.	All stages, beginning with USP.

Source: Qualitative mapping from source records; no group sizes or proportional estimates are available

Table 6. Internal and External Barriers Identified from Activity Records

Type	Barrier	Relevant context	Evidence / status
Internal	Limited marketing and business knowledge	Particularly relevant to enterprises still defining product value.	Identified in the programme needs assessment.
Internal	Limited familiarity with packaging formats	Discussed across products with basic packages.	Product inspection and packaging discussions.
Internal	Limited funds for packaging and promotion	Producers considering more consistent product presentation.	Participant-reported constraints.
Internal	Uncertainty or limited confidence in developing a product brand	Mentioned as a general barrier; cannot be reliably allocated to specific groups.	Qualitative activity account; no group-level measurement.
Internal	Limited use of marketing technology	A stated area for skill development.	Programme needs identification.
External	Weak market networks and sales-channel access	Especially relevant to home-based producers.	Initial marketing assessment.
External	Weak connection between products and destination promotion	Generic goods predominate at nearby points of sale.	Observation and discussion of destination products.
External	Institutional support for financing, equipment, compliance, and brand protection	A potential requirement for scaling beyond design concepts.	Identified follow-up needs, not evidence of support already delivered.

Source: Classified from extension discussions and original documentation.

Discussion

Product Characteristics and Marketing Constraints near Sungai Suci

The first research question concerns what local producers already offer and why additional differentiation and positioning support is needed. Household producers have cassava-based foods, mocaf, and other products that can potentially form part of the tourism economy. Yet the existence of a product does not automatically make its origin or customer value apparent. The packaging recorded in Figure 2 provides some practical protection and identification, but much of it does not offer a distinctive consumer message.

Within PDB, the situation suggests an imbalance between the content of the offering and the way it is communicated. Cassava ingredients and production practices offer possible material for differentiation, but packaging, origin stories, and label consistency require further development. Kartajaya and Yuswohady (2005) emphasize that differentiation encompasses content, context, and supporting infrastructure. Improving visuals alone would therefore address only one part of the problem.

Mocaf is particularly instructive. A participant perceived cassava flour produced in Pasar Pedati as a local specialty. That perception is useful for exploring how producers understand their products, but it is not independent evidence of exclusivity or consumer preference. Responsible positioning would specify a verifiable local origin or producer association rather than claiming that no similar product exists elsewhere.

Three related constraints emerge: potential product attributes are not consistently described as meaningful distinctions; packaging does not yet fully communicate producer or place identity; and products are poorly integrated with destination-related sales and promotion. These constraints are not uniform. Mocaf producers can refine an emerging story and a draft identity, whereas cassava-snack makers need to begin by

identifying an attribute that is truly worth communicating. Prospective entrepreneurs require still earlier support. Individualized follow-up is therefore more appropriate than assuming that all participants need the same packaging workshop.

The internal/external barrier distinction further clarifies implementation. Producer knowledge, basic packaging skills, and confidence can be addressed through coaching, while market access and connections with the tourism sector require action by destination managers, local institutions, and government agencies. Financial constraints have an internal dimension (limited business funds) and an external dimension (access to capital and equipment). These findings are compatible with Darmanto et al.'s (2024) observation that Bengkulu tourism marketing is affected by coordination among stakeholders.

Applying USP to Differentiation and Intended Brand Positioning

The second research question concerns the extension process. USP provided a straightforward way to shift the conversation from “How should the packaging look?” to “What can the packaging credibly say?” Participants considered raw materials, product characteristics, origins, and reasons a customer might select one item rather than another. They then explored how the preferred distinction could be reflected in an intended brand position and a design concept.

The logic is product characteristics → candidate USP → differentiation → intended positioning → brand and packaging concept. For example, if a producer wishes to communicate a product's connection with local cassava and Pasar Pedati, the label and supporting narrative should accurately reflect those facts. The programme combined explanations with familiar examples and opportunities to sketch a design. This may be understood as a modest form of co-creation: producers bring practical knowledge of their products while facilitators provide a marketing vocabulary and a process for articulating their potential value.

The observed outputs are qualitative. Participants discussed possible distinctions and proposed how they wanted products to be recognized; draft design work followed. Without pretest–posttest records, structured scores, and evidence of commercial use, the activity cannot be credited with a quantified increase in knowledge or a proven shift in market position. It demonstrates an initial translation of concepts into draft decisions.

Figure 3. Community Extension Activity on Product Differentiation and Brand Positioning



Source: Original community extension photographic documentation

From Marketing Knowledge to Proposed Business Decisions

The layered empowerment framework helps distinguish what the programme achieved from what it envisaged. At the knowledge level, participants discussed the distinction between product appearance and meaningful customer value. At the capability level, they attempted to apply that distinction to their own products, notably by considering cassava ingredients, local producers, and geographic associations as possible marketing attributes.

At the business-decision level, the strongest evidence consists of proposals: participants considered which products to develop, what kind of packaging to use, and how the label might communicate an identity. Figure 4 records an initial cassava-flour/mocaf label concept. It demonstrates a proposed brand representation, not proof that a product was subsequently sold in the new package, that customers preferred it, or that producers changed prices or outlets.

At the collective-action level, the programme suggests that different products could share recognizable references to Sungai Suci while retaining their individual character. This remains an implementation possibility, not a documented binding agreement among producers. Realizing it would require ongoing roles for producer groups, village-owned enterprises (BUMDes), or tourism managers. The distinction is consistent with the need for organizational support highlighted by Sabda et al. (2026).

These layers also explain why training participation should not be equated with changed entrepreneurial behaviour. Lawelai et al. (2024) distinguish favorable perceptions from the economic awareness associated with active participation. A next stage in Sungai Suci would need to connect proposed brand identity with affordable packaging, realistic pricing, accessible market channels, and actual adoption measures.

Packaging Concepts and Their Potential Role in Destination Promotion

The third research question addresses whether product differentiation, intended brand positioning, and packaging could potentially contribute to tourism communication. Packaging is a useful focus because it can carry a product's origin and story at the point of sale and after a visitor takes the product home. A credible reference to Sungai Suci or Bengkulu may create a connection between the purchased good and its place of origin.

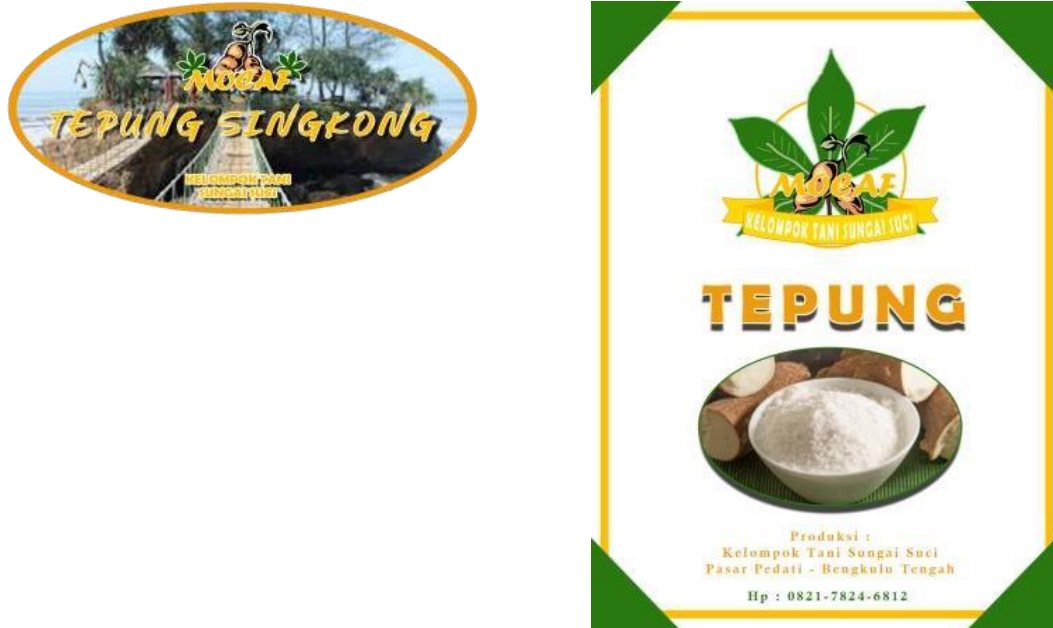
This possibility resonates with Bungin's (2015) account of tourism marketing and with Puspita et al.'s (2018) emphasis on distinctive propositions for Bengkulu tourism. In this conceptual view, packaging serves both a commercial function—identifying a product—and a possible communication function—conveying a place association. The second function is not established merely by printing the destination's name.

Relevant research calls for caution. Suhartanto et al. (2018) show why uniqueness and authenticity should precede cosmetic redesign. Suci et al. (2022) suggest that particular visual cues do not necessarily produce the same consumer response, while Birch and Memery (2020) show that favourable attitudes towards local foods do not guarantee purchasing when origin credibility or distribution is weak. The proposed Sungai Suci identity would therefore need consumer testing, reliable place-of-origin information, and appropriate sales points.

The original programme produced a cassava-flour/mocaf label example (Figure 4), providing tangible evidence of a design-stage outcome. The package images retain the language and visual details of the observed artefacts. The study did not collect visitor data on recognition, recall, recommendation, willingness to pay, purchase behaviour, or

changes in tourist arrivals. Thus, stronger destination association is a hypothesis for follow-up activities rather than an observed effect.

Figure 4. Original and proposed product-identity designs for cassava flour/mocaf



Source: Original documentation and design outputs; text printed on photographed labels is retained as evidence

Taken together, the conceptual progression is locally grounded attribute → USP → differentiation → intended brand position → packaging identity → possible product–destination association. If supported by tourism actors, that progression could provide a basis for jointly communicating the destination through different local goods. However, standardized place references should not erase meaningful differences among producers or substitute for compliance with product-information requirements.

Integrating the Findings with PDB

The results correspond to PDB in three ways. First, differentiation as the product's central tactic appeared when producers discussed real attributes such as raw materials and local production. Second, positioning as a strategic intention appeared when they considered how a visitor should understand the product. Third, the brand as an expression of value appeared in names, labels, and packaging proposals.

The programme consequently went beyond a purely decorative approach to packaging by encouraging alignment between product content, claimed difference, intended audience perception, and visible brand representation. It also suggests a possible category of destination-linked product brands, whose meaning partly derives from place associations. This is an analytical interpretation of the documented process, not a claim that such brands have already been established or recognized by consumers.

Implementation Roles for MSMEs and Tourism Stakeholders

The design concepts can become practical only if different actors address the barriers identified in Table 6. MSME operators control their product choices and the implementation of packaging, but village institutions, the regency government, and destination managers may be needed to support compliance, joint sales channels, market visibility, and access to visitors. Table 7 proposes a division of responsibilities and

indicators that can be monitored during a follow-up stage. These are recommendations, not activities confirmed as completed.

Table 7. Proposed Implementation Responsibilities and Observable Outputs

Stakeholder	Proposed actions	Follow-up evidence	Barrier addressed
MSME operators	Document one credible product distinction, draft a concise position, test a label with buyers, and introduce packaging in affordable stages.	Written positioning statement, actual use of new labels, basic sales logs.	Skills, confidence, financial constraints.
Village government, BUMDes, or producer groups	Coordinate purchases of packaging materials, establish a local-product display, and agree on optional shared place-related visual elements.	Shared design guidance and a functioning display/sales point.	Collective action, market access, packaging costs.
Central Bengkulu Regency agencies	Support applicable product permits, brand protection, packaging equipment or funding access, and inclusion in official tourism promotion.	Permitted products and documented participation in promotion.	Compliance, resources, institutional connections.
Sungai Suci destination managers	Provide suitable local sales points, share verified producer stories, and collect visitor feedback.	Sales-space provision, joint communications, visitor-response records.	Market channels and place association.

Source: Authors' proposed implementation matrix based on documented barriers

Implementation could begin with products that already have a plausible attribute and a design concept, such as mocaf, while other producers continue USP identification. A phased approach would allow local stakeholders to examine packaging affordability and obtain buyer feedback before committing to wider use. Visitor studies would then be needed to evaluate propositions P1 and P2.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, the study illustrates how PDB can be interpreted within community empowerment by distinguishing knowledge, capability, draft business decisions, and collective-action possibilities. It extends product differentiation discussions toward the possibility of a relationship with place identity, while keeping that relationship at the level of a testable proposition.

Practically, support should be adapted to the needs of each producer category and connected with institutions responsible for sales infrastructure, appropriate regulatory support, and tourism promotion. Future evaluation should separately assess learning, adoption of the designs, commercial performance, and visitor-related indicators. The measurement plan in Table 8 is prospective; it does not describe data already collected.

Table 8. Proposed Indicators for a Follow-up Evaluation

Level	Indicator	Proposed measurement	Suggested timing
Learning	Understanding of USP, differentiation, and positioning	Structured pretest and posttest.	Before and immediately after training.
Learning / design	Quality of brand and packaging concepts	Rubric-based review of proposals before and after mentoring.	During and after mentoring.
Adoption	Actual use of revised labels or packages	Document the proportion of producers adopting designs by group.	3–6 months.
Market	Sales volume and actual selling prices	Compare product records before and after package adoption, with suitable caveats.	Around 6 months.
Visitor perceptions	Unaided and aided brand recall; product–place associations	On-site visitor surveys, including buyers and non-buyers where feasible.	6–12 months.
Visitor intentions	Recommendation and revisit intentions	Structured visitor survey; do not infer actual behaviour.	6–12 months.
Destination	Visitor counts	Official visit records interpreted alongside other influences.	Around 12 months.

Source: Prospective design derived from the evidence boundaries and untested propositions P1–P2

CONCLUSION

The extension programme conducted near the Sungai Suci tourism area produced three main qualitative outputs. Participants considered product attributes that might provide meaningful differentiation, including locally sourced cassava and the identities of community producers. They discussed how products could be positioned in the minds of visitors, for example as foods associated with Pasar Pedati or Sungai Suci. They also expressed those ideas in initial brand and packaging concepts, including a mocaf label design. These outcomes indicate engagement with marketing concepts and the preparation of draft business choices, not a measured increase in knowledge or evidence of commercial adoption.

The support required differed by type of business. Mocaf producers had a potential local story and needed stronger positioning and more consistent packaging, whereas producers of common cassava snacks required further USP identification. Information about fish-based products was insufficient for a more specific assessment. Internal barriers concerned marketing and packaging knowledge, capital, and confidence; external barriers involved market access, institutional support, and weak connections with tourism promotion. An effective follow-up should therefore combine tailored producer mentoring with roles for village institutions, regency agencies, and destination managers.

The programme's practical marketing logic moves from identifying a credible USP to differentiation, intended positioning, and a coherent brand and package. A stronger association between local products and the Sungai Suci destination is plausible but has not been established empirically. The documentation did not provide complete

participant counts, a structured pretest–posttest, verified adoption records, sales outcomes, visitor perceptions, brand recall, or post-programme tourism statistics. Future work should measure design adoption, buyer reactions, sales, and destination association independently before drawing any conclusions about economic or tourism impact.

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