

Strengthening Songket Palembang Business

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ABSTRACT

Songket is a traditional fabric from Palembang that remains in high demand. Over time, its motifs have become increasingly diverse, even incorporating elements from other cultures. Unfortunately, sales have been hampered, so this project sought to strengthen these challenges and address them. This project was conducted through an interview with Songket business owner, Mr Fikri, on September 15, 2024, and a visit to the industry center. Results revealed a decline in sales due to change of Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin International Airport's status as a domestic airport, in addition to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Suggestions were given to increase online sales and propose to the local government for change domestic airport to an international airport status.

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INTRODUCTION

Palembang songket is a type of traditional cloth made using gold and silver thread. The origin of the word Songket is "tusuk" and "cukit" which then changed to "sukit" or "sungkit" to become 'songket'. Songket cloth also has various types, namely Songket Lepus, Songket tawur, Songket Tretes Mender, Songket Bungo Pacik, Songket Kombinasi and Songket Limar (Ulhaq & Enrico, 2022). In addition to enriching domestic fashion, Songket can also be attached to Muslim bridal wear (Indarti & Salsabilla, 2023 cited by Fatmawati & Indarti, 2024) and in ready-to-wear clothing (Febriyanti, 2022 cited by Fatmawati & Indarti, 2024). Recent research shows that Songket cloth can also be combined with Sashiko which carries Japanese culture. Both are combined by choosing "clematis flowers" as the theme, colored with red to symbolize elegant and dignified values and a combination of silver to emphasize the motif and basic color (Fatmawati & Indarti, 2024). Besides flowers, dragons are also a motif due to their geographical location, which includes rivers and swamps, and their belief that they can bring blessings. The Nago Besaung motif is divided into three parts: main motif (the body of songket), filler motif (the head of songket), and isen motif (the edge of songket). The motif depicts

the dragons fighting, their bodies clasped together, their mouths open, their eyes wide, their wings spread, and their horns curved forward (Budi Laksana, 2019).

In its development, Palembang Songket has received considerable research attention aimed at ensuring the continued growth of this traditional fabric. First, marketing. Two studies show ways to develop Palembang Songket: through websites promoting Songket products and works, Facebook, and print media (Berlian & Rini, 2018; Komalasari & Seprina, 2018). Second, finance. One study showed that the liquidity ratio of a Songket shop on Jalan Kapten Cek Syeh was in poor condition, as was the profitability ratio, which fluctuated from 2016 to 2020 (Defa et al., 2022). The artisans have also received training in financial reporting using Excel (Siregar et al., 2021).

Unfortunately, studies on Palembang Songket still need to be continuously updated, so this community service activity tries to explore the obstacles and challenges through an in-depth interview with one of Palembang Songket business owners.

IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

This activity was carried out on September 15, 2024, through a visit to the Palembang Songket business "Fikri Koleksi" located at Jl. Ki Ranga Wirasantika Wirosentiko No. 500, 30 Ilir, Ilir Bar. II District, Palembang City, South Sumatra 30129. This activity was carried out for 2 hours with the business owner named Mr. Fikri while also directly observing the songket production place. To obtain information, a semi-structured interview was conducted. With this method, the interviewer has prepared a topic and a list of questions before the interview was conducted. The interviewer will explore a topic further based on the answers given by the participants.

This activity is also a series of National Leader Forum which is held as a result of collaboration between the Indonesian Japanese Alumni Family (KAPPIJA 21), Human Resources Development Agency (BPSDM) of South Sumatra, Kwik Kian Gie Institute of Business and Informatics and other universities in Indonesia and Malaysia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Business History

Mr. Fikri, the business owner, explained that he started his business in 1997, during the monetary crisis, but was helped by the New Order's policies, which, through the Ministry of Trade, opened entrepreneurship training in Palembang. The department provided 10 days of training in management and entrepreneurship. Furthermore, Mr. Fikri received a soft loan, unsecured and interest-free, of Rp. 25,000,000. He used the funds to purchase raw materials, weaving tools, and other supplies.

Mr. Fikri chose this business because he also learned from his mother. Mr. Fikri's mother was skilled in making Palembang Songket and was even asked to teach at a women's prison and received an award from President Suharto for her success in developing the women's prison knowledge.

B. The Journey of Mr. Fikri's Palembang Songket Business

Mr. Fikri explained that his Songket business was founded through hard work. The business achieved significant success during the 2018 ASEAN Games in Palembang. At that time, Mr. Fikri ventured to raise capital through a bank loan for business expansion, including purchasing land behind his house. The goal was to increase production and sales capacity, including space for product displays, a space for customer discussions, and a production area. Furthermore, the additional land was used to build residential facilities

for employees so they would not have to travel home. Unfortunately, Mr. Fikri's success was tested by COVID-19 pandemic. At that time, production stopped for four years due to a lack of demand from buyers and customers, coupled with various restrictions on community activities by the government, including the furloughing of all employees.

Second challenge Mr. Fikri faced was conversion of Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin II Airport from an international airport to a domestic airport. He explained that most of his customers were tourists from Singapore, Brunei, and largest number came from Malaysia. They typically arrived on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays. This change resulted in a decline in international customers, leaving the airport relying solely on domestic tourists.

C. Sales and Marketing Media

Mr. Fikri explained that all sales are conducted offline, meaning customers come in, see product directly, and even try products. He believes this method is better because customers can experience Songket themselves and see the colors they choose. Mr. Fikri's business not only sells woven Songket but also sells fabric that can be sewn into complete women's clothing sets, including scarves, and a variety of Palembang batik for both men and women. Prices range from men's batik for Rp 150,000 to woven songket for over Rp 10,000,000. Besides offline sales, he also uses online channels, including Instagram and Facebook, and even livestreams. However, he stated that these online sales are solely for promotional purposes.

Mr. Fikri also stated that alternative sales methods include using departments and travel agencies. This step is also taken to ensure buyers can come directly, hold, and feel Songket quality of desired materials, an experience that cannot be achieved solely through photographs due to the effects of lighting.

D. Production Method

The products produced by this business are batik, Songket, and Jumputan. Mr. Fikri explained that all the motifs used are designed and hand-woven, using a technique called "cukitan." After the "cukit" (cutting), the motifs are drawn and then finished. The weaving process, from the white thread to the finished fabric, takes approximately three months. The entire process involves four people, including design, dyeing, washing, and weaving. Mr. Fikri stated that, despite the advancement of technology, weaving machines cannot currently replace manual labor, even though the majority of the workers are housewives. They are recruited, trained, and nurtured based on their artistic spirit, patience, and perseverance. This manual method is considered superior due to its unique characteristics, for example, when a guest from the Japanese Embassy visited, he observed for an hour how the woven fabric was produced.

E. Analysis and Solutions

From the interviews conducted, at least three problems emerged. First, the Palembang Songket industry is a major tourist attraction for both local and international tourists. Its continued existence demonstrates that this industry significantly benefits businesses, including the local government. Therefore, the local government should provide numerous incentives for these businesses, including the reopening of Sultan Mahmud Baharuddin II Airport as an international airport. This incentive offers at least three benefits.

First, reopening the route for international tourists to visit and shop, potentially increasing revenue for the songket industry and other supporting industries, such as hotels, culinary arts, and transportation. Second, reopening promotional networks to international tourists, as their arrivals serve as a means of conveying a positive image to other tourists who have never visited Palembang. Third, providing opportunities for entrepreneurs to participate

in government-organized exhibitions and attracting international customers. This proposal aligns with previous research that found that providing space for international tourists would increase employment and spur local economic growth. In addition, it can provide a positive signal to investors and global tourism business actors regarding the friendly and dynamic business climate in Indonesia (Ramadhoni, 2025).

The second problem revealed was Songket business prioritized offline sales than online. Therefore, suggestion is to participate more frequently in exhibitions held by both the regional and central governments. This suggestion is highly recommended because products offered can provide added value to the government, particularly the South Sumatra regional government. Two previous studies have shown that exhibitions offer numerous benefits. Businesses can directly build networks with the government and specific communities, understand market dynamics and consumer preferences, and increase their innovation capacity (Ernawati et al., 2025). Furthermore, exhibitions allow businesses to interact directly (Fakhrurozi, 2023).

Third issue, because online sales are not particularly prominent, is suggestion to continue using Facebook, Instagram, and similar platforms as a showcase for introducing products to consumers, even though the Songket business doesn't have a dedicated team to manage it. By continuing to utilize social media, Songket business will remain easily accessible to the public, including local governments, as part of the small and medium enterprise catalog. This suggestion aligns with previous research that suggests that online sales can reach national and even international markets, reducing distribution and storage costs (Nafisa, 2021).



Figure 1. Activities at Songket production center

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on discussion above, three issues emerge. First, loss of Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin International Airport's status, a preference for offline sales over online, and third, a decline in offline sales. Therefore, the recommendations include reopening international airport status, participating more in exhibitions held by the central and regional governments, and expanding online sales with a support team.

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