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The Role of Innovative Leadership in Developing Turmeric-Based Skincare Products in the Beauty Industry

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Abstract
This study examines how innovative leadership shapes the development of turmeric-based skincare products at QM, a women-led Indonesian beauty brand founded by Liani Wijaya. As consumer demand for natural skincare continues to grow, turmeric has regained commercial relevance, yet limited research explores how innovative leadership transforms traditional herbal knowledge into modern product innovation. This descriptive qualitative study employed a case study approach. Data were collected through an in-depth online interview with the founder and supported by documentation, then analysed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis. The findings reveal that QM's innovative leadership is characterized by a listening-oriented, participative, and empowering approach that promotes innovation, teamwork, and continuous product improvement. Product development involves iterative research and development, expert collaboration, strict quality control, and customer feedback integration. The primary challenge is building consumer trust in herbal-based products rather than market competition. The study concludes that innovative leadership enables the successful transformation of local herbal resources into competitive skincare products while fostering sustainable innovation through a strong listening culture.
Keywords: Innovative Leadership, Product Innovation, Women Entrepreneurship.

INTRODUCTION

The global beauty industry is undergoing a fundamental paradigm shift. Modern consumers increasingly favor natural-ingredient products and pay close attention to how those ingredients are sourced and marketed, rather than focusing on aesthetic results alone (Nguyen et al., 2024). This shift has driven a wave of product innovation built on traditional herbal knowledge repurposed for contemporary skincare. Within this dynamic, turmeric (Curcuma longa) has moved from a traditional spice toward becoming a widely recognized active ingredient in modern skincare formulation, with consumer research showing measurable willingness to pay for turmeric-based products ((Nguyen et al., 2024).

Turmeric has long been used in Indonesian beauty traditions, including the traditional Javanese lulur scrub and various herbal preparations passed down

through generations as a skin-care treatment (Asnia et al., 2019). The turmeric rhizome is reported to contain compounds with antioxidant and skin-beneficial properties, which is part of why it has remained a staple of traditional Indonesian beauty practice even as formal cosmetic science has taken interest in it (Asnia et al., 2019). At the same time, growing market interest in turmeric has opened new commercial pathways, including dedicated national initiatives to support turmeric-based business development (Dalailama, 2025).

The scientific foundation for herbal-based skincare has grown considerably in recent years. A comprehensive review of herbal-derived products with skin anti-aging properties documents that natural plant compounds act through multiple biological mechanisms, including stimulating collagen synthesis, reducing oxidative stress, and inhibiting melanin-producing enzymes, and that specific compounds such as ferulic acid and gallic acid, along with herbal formulations from plants such as Panax ginseng and Thymus vulgaris, have been validated through clinical trials as promising active ingredients for modern dermocosmetic development (Costa et al., 2022). This growing body of evidence has contributed to the rapid expansion of the global cosmetics industry, valued at USD 380.2 billion in 2019 and projected to reach USD 463.5 billion by 2027, as consumers and manufacturers alike increasingly turn to plant-derived ingredients as safer, evidence-backed alternatives (Costa et al., 2022). Nevertheless, developing turmeric-based skincare products is far from straightforward. Working with turmeric in a cosmetic context requires managing practical issues such as the rhizome's natural pigmentation and the processing steps needed to turn a raw traditional ingredient into a stable, market-ready product (Asnia et al., 2019). Translating this raw potential into a viable commercial product also depends on supportive business infrastructure and market access, which is part of what current turmeric-industry initiatives are trying to address (Dalailama, 2025). Consequently, the success of such product innovation depends not only on raw-material quality but also on an organization's capacity and its leader's capacity to manage the innovation process effectively (Cortes & Herrmann, 2021).

One company in Indonesia seeking to transform turmeric's potential into modern skincare products is QM. The brand was founded by Liani Wijaya and has developed a range of turmeric-based products that have obtained BPOM and Halal certification. QM's emergence illustrates how a local herbal ingredient can be transformed into a value-added, competitively positioned product within an increasingly crowded beauty market.

The growth of natural-ingredient skincare brands such as QM cannot be separated from the expanding role of women in entrepreneurship, particularly within the skincare and beauty sector. Recent research on women-led innovation in skincare marketing shows that women entrepreneurs often draw

on personal insight, relational communication, and close attentiveness to consumer needs when building product lines and shaping brand identity (Kannan & Jagannarayan, 2025). Within this context, a founder's leadership style becomes a critical factor shaping the direction of product development and the long-term sustainability of the business.

A substantial body of prior research has found that leadership style exerts a significant influence on organizational innovation and new product development outcomes. Studies on CEO-level transformational leadership show that it shapes organizational factors which, in turn, affect product innovation performance (Sattayaraksa & Boon-itt, 2018). Similarly, research on leadership styles and team innovative behavior demonstrates that the way a leader engages a team directly affects the success of new product development efforts (Li et al., 2024). More broadly, strategic leadership scholarship frames innovation leadership as a distinct organizational capability requiring its own theoretical attention, separate from general leadership theory (Cortes & Herrmann, 2021).

Although the literature on leadership and innovation has grown considerably, much of this research has been conducted on larger, established organizations rather than small, founder-led ventures (Cortes & Herrmann, 2021; Sattayaraksa & Boon-itt, 2018). Research examining how innovative leadership is practiced specifically in the development of herbal-based skincare products in Indonesia remains very limited. Furthermore, while women-led innovation in skincare marketing has begun to receive scholarly attention (Kannan & Jagannarayan, 2025), studies that examine how women leaders translate traditional herbal knowledge into modern product innovation, particularly using turmeric, remain scarce.

Leadership

Leadership has been studied extensively across disciplines, yet scholars have long struggled to arrive at a single, universally accepted definition. Northouse (2016) notes that defining leadership has proved a challenging endeavor, with more than 200 distinct definitions identified in the scholarly literature over the course of the twentieth century alone, reflecting the concept's inherent complexity. Despite this diversity of definitions, Northouse (2016) identifies four components that are consistently central to the phenomenon: leadership is a process, it involves influence, it occurs in groups, and it involves the pursuit of common goals. Drawing on these components, leadership is defined as a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal (Northouse, 2016). Understood this way, leadership is not a fixed trait residing in a particular person, but a transactional and interactive event between a leader and followers, in which both parties affect and are affected by each other. This relational conception is reinforced by more recent scholarship,

which characterizes leadership and followership as a mutual social influence process oriented toward the achievement of shared goals, wherein leaders exert influence over others while followers actively accept, interpret, and act upon that influence rather than merely receiving it passively (Bastardoz & Van Vugt, 2019).

Central to the leadership process is the figure of the leader. Maxwell (2002) argues that the true measure of leadership is influence, nothing more, nothing less, emphasizing that leadership does not derive from title or formal position alone, but from the genuine capacity to move others toward a shared purpose. A leader, in this sense, is someone whose ability to influence others determines both their personal effectiveness and the potential of the organization they lead: the stronger the leadership, the higher the ceiling on what the organization can achieve (Maxwell, 2002). Importantly, this capacity is not staticMaxwell (2002) further contends that leadership ability is a collection of skills that can be learned and developed over time through sustained discipline, experience, and a commitment to growth. The effectiveness of a leader's influence, however, is not determined solely by the leader's actions but also by how followers perceive and interpret those actions, since the extent to which a leader's intended style actually shapes followers and, consequently, organizational outcomes depend largely on followers' perceptions of that leadership (Mindeguia et al., 2025). This relational, perceptual, and developmental understanding of leadership provides the foundation for examining how innovative leadership operates, particularly within founder-led ventures where the leader's vision and influence shape organizational outcomes most directly.

Innovative Leadership

Strategic leadership scholarship treats the leadership of innovation as a distinct organizational capability rather than a simple extension of general leadership theory, arguing that it deserves its own dedicated framework of study (Cortes & Herrmann, 2021). Within this framing, an innovative leader is understood as someone whose primary role is to create the organizational conditions under which new ideas can emerge, be tested, and be carried through to implementation, rather than someone who merely directs day-to-day operations (Cortes & Herrmann, 2021).

A critical review of the leadership-creativity-innovation literature similarly concludes that leadership influences innovation primarily by shaping the psychological and social conditions that make creative work possible, rather than by directly producing innovative outcomes itself (Hughes et al., 2018). This same review cautions that much of the existing evidence is fragmented across different leadership styles and outcome measures, and calls for more practically grounded recommendations on how leaders can deliberately cultivate creativity within their teams (Hughes et al., 2018).

At the team level, the way a leader behaves has a measurable effect on innovative outcomes. Research on leadership styles and team innovative behavior finds that leadership directly shapes how teams engage in creative problem-solving, which in turn affects the performance of new green product development efforts (Li et al., 2024). This suggests that innovative leadership operates not only as a strategic, top-down force but also as a day-to-day influence on how teams behave and collaborate. A recent multi-study investigation clarifies the specific content of this construct, identifying innovative leadership as comprising five distinct dimensions, namely thinking creatively, holding the willpower to be innovative, tolerating differing opinions and various risks, establishing mechanisms for innovation, and implementing innovation ideas, each of which was found to relate significantly to innovative performance in the workplace at both the individual and team levels (Zhu et al., 2024).

At the executive level, CEO transformational leadership has been shown to shape organizational factors that subsequently influence product innovation performance, indicating that a leader's style filters down through the organization before ultimately affecting innovation outcomes (Sattayaraksa & Boon-itt, 2018). This pattern is especially pronounced in resource-constrained contexts, as research on technology start-ups demonstrates that entrepreneurial leadership promotes innovative work behavior and opportunity recognition, with these effects being partly mediated by the innovative culture that the leader cultivates within the firm (Kiran, 2025). In small and founder-led enterprises in particular, this chain is shorter and more direct: the founder's personal vision and leadership style tend to be embedded almost immediately in the organization's innovation outcomes, since there are fewer intermediate layers of management between the leader and the product itself.

Innovation and Product Development

Innovation research has long sought to identify what actually drives the emergence of new ideas and products. One influential account argues that innovation is shaped by three main forces: intellectual property institutions, the supply side of innovation, and the availability of financing through channels such as venture capital (Nicholas, 2011). Complementing this institutional view, long-run economic-history evidence points to market demand, technological opportunity, and competitive dynamics as additional key drivers of innovative activity over time (Taalbi, 2017).

From an economic perspective, a critical distinction must be drawn between innovation and invention. Drawing on Schumpeter's foundational trilogy, Adam & Cornescu (2019) argue that innovation from the producer's perspective comprises three sequential components: idea, implementation, and commercialization. It is only when a new or improved product is effectively

adopted by consumers in the market that it can properly be called an innovation; if the product is developed but never commercially released, it remains an invention. This distinction is particularly consequential for product-based ventures, where commercial viability, not simply technical novelty, determines whether the innovation process has been completed.

Product innovation is the dimension of innovation most directly visible to consumers and most consequential for competitive positioning. Maier (2018) describes product innovation as what allows a better product to be offered than those currently on the market, enabling companies to gain competitive advantage by differentiating production, increasing quality and variety of goods, and opening new growth opportunities. Adam & Cornescu (2019) further categorize innovative products into four types based on Henderson and Clark's classification: incremental, modular, architectural, and radical innovation, ranging from gradual improvement of existing assemblies to the creation of entirely new fundamental concepts and connections.

The process through which product innovation is realized follows a recognizable sequence. Adam & Cornescu (2019) describe three main stages: the idea stage, involving creativity, idea selection, and development; the implementation stage, covering planning, product development, and testing; and the commercialization stage, including market testing, managing consumer resistance, and achieving effective mass commercialization. Customer feedback is emphasized as critical throughout, particularly during development and testing phases.

Empirical work on CEO transformational leadership and product innovation performance shows that leadership-shaped organizational factors are a meaningful predictor of innovation success (Sattayaraksa & Boon-itt, 2018), while studies on team-level behavior show that innovative capability mediates the relationship between leadership style and new product development performance (Li et al., 2024). Ferreras-Méndez et al. (2021) further demonstrate in the SME context that entrepreneurial orientation contributes to new product development performance both directly and indirectly through business model innovation, which acts as a partial mediating mechanism. These findings underscore that successful product innovation depends not only on a leader's vision and orientation, but on the organizational capabilities through which that vision is converted into market-ready offerings.

Women Entrepreneurial Leadership

A Women-led entrepreneurship in the skincare sector has become a notable subject of recent research attention. A study on women-led innovation in skincare marketing finds that women entrepreneurs frequently bring distinctive strengths to product and brand development, including strong relational

communication with consumers and a close attentiveness to evolving beauty needs (Kannan & Jagannarayan, 2025).

The broader literature on women in leadership reinforces this picture. Research on the transformation of leadership in modern society finds that women leaders often exhibit higher levels of emotional intelligence, empathy, and collaborative skills, enabling them to manage teams effectively amidst uncertainty and complex social dynamics (Rozyeva, 2025). The same research notes that women leaders tend to employ a transformational leadership style, inspiring and motivating their teams, which is particularly valuable in periods of rapid change, and that women-owned firms are more likely to support innovation through developing new products for new markets and allocating greater investment in research and development (Rozyeva, 2025).

These characteristics make women-led ventures particularly well-suited to the kind of iterative, consumer-responsive product innovation that characterizes the natural skincare sector. Empirical evidence further indicates that women entrepreneurs' capacity for innovation is strongly facilitated by the establishment of close and frequent interpersonal connections, suggesting that relational and network-building capabilities serve as important enablers of innovation performance in women-led firms (Chávez-Rivera et al., 2024). Within the beauty industry specifically, research on women-led innovation in skincare marketing suggests that women leaders often draw on personal and cultural experience as a direct source of product inspiration, which allows them to design offerings that feel authentic to the communities they serve rather than generically formulated for a mass market (Kannan & Jagannarayan, 2025). This pattern is particularly relevant in markets such as Indonesia, where traditional beauty practices involving herbal ingredients like turmeric remain culturally significant and commercially meaningful.

Turmeric-Based Skincare Innovation

Turmeric (*Curcuma longa*) has a medicinal history spanning nearly 6,000 years and has been widely used across Asia in traditional medicine, religious ceremonies, and cosmetic applications, with records of Indian women applying it to the skin as one of the earliest cosmetic uses (Tian et al., 2025). In Indonesia specifically, its role in beauty culture, from traditional *lulur* preparations to modern formulations, reflects a deep-rooted practice that has persisted across generations (Asnia et al., 2019). This traditional foundation has fed directly into commercial interest, as consumer research shows that buyers are increasingly willing to pay a premium for products built around naturally derived ingredients like turmeric (Nguyen et al., 2024).

The scientific basis for turmeric's relevance to skin health has grown considerably in recent years. The rhizome contains numerous bioactive

compounds, most notably curcuminoids, of which curcumin makes up more than 70%, alongside essential oils containing sesquiterpenes, all of which contribute to its broad spectrum of biological effects (Kryst, 2023). Modern pharmacological research has confirmed that turmeric exhibits significant anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, and antimicrobial activities, with the curcumin market across pharmaceutical, food, and cosmetics applications reaching USD 98.7 million in 2023 and projected to grow at a 9.1% compound annual growth rate through 2032 (Tian et al., 2025). A systematic review of clinical evidence further documents that both topical and oral turmeric and curcumin products have shown benefits across a range of skin conditions including acne, atopic dermatitis, facial photoaging, and psoriasis (Vaughn et al., 2016). In the dermocosmetic context specifically, curcumin has been shown to inhibit enzymes responsible for the degradation of collagen and elastin, reduce skin hyperpigmentation caused by UV-induced melanogenesis, and deliver antioxidant protection against environmental damage, making it particularly well-suited for anti-aging and skin-protective formulations (Kryst, 2023).

At the same time, translating turmeric's potential into a stable, commercially viable skincare product is not straightforward. Working with turmeric in a cosmetic context requires managing its natural yellow pigmentation and addressing formulation challenges including its poor water solubility and sensitivity to alkaline conditions, which demand deliberate technical solutions to ensure product stability and effective skin penetration (Kryst, 2023). The broader push to support turmeric as a commercial commodity, including national-level efforts to back turmeric-based business ventures, signals that the ingredient's market potential is being recognized at a systemic level, beyond individual brands (Dalailama, 2025). These dynamics underscore the importance of organizational and leadership capacity in successfully translating a traditional ingredient into a competitive modern product.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research used a qualitative descriptive analytical method with a case study approach to explore how innovative leadership shapes the development of turmeric-based skincare products at QM.

Informants

The informant in this study was selected using purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique in which participants are deliberately chosen based on their direct relevance to the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The primary informant was Liani Wijaya, the founder and owner of QM, who was selected on the basis of her central role in directing the company's innovation strategy, product development decisions, and overall business direction. As the founding leader of the brand, she possesses first-hand knowledge of all aspects of QM's innovation journey that no other respondent could provide. To strengthen the credibility and depth of the data, additional

informants may be considered in future data collection stages, such as team members involved in the product development process or consumers of QM products, depending on data saturation needs.

Place of Research and Time of Research

This research was conducted virtually through an online video call platform, targeting QM, a turmeric-based skincare brand founded and operated in Indonesia. The virtual setting was chosen to accommodate the geographical distance between the researcher and the informant, as well as the informant's scheduling constraints. The virtual research setting did not diminish the depth of data collection, as in-depth interviews conducted via digital platforms have been widely recognized as a valid and effective method for qualitative inquiry, particularly in the context of small business and entrepreneurship research (Lobe et al., 2020). Data collection was carried out on June 22, 2026. The primary informant in this study was Liani Wijaya, the founder and owner of QM, who was selected due to her central role in directing the company's innovation strategy and product development.

Instrumentation

The primary data collection instrument used in this study was a semi-structured interview guide developed by the researcher. The guide was designed to elicit rich, detailed responses on three main thematic areas: (1) the informant's leadership practices and philosophy as the founder of QM; (2) the product innovation and development process for QM's turmeric-based skincare line; and (3) the drivers and barriers encountered throughout the innovation journey. The semi-structured format allowed the researcher to maintain a consistent focus on the research questions while retaining sufficient flexibility to probe emerging themes and follow unexpected lines of inquiry as they arose during the conversation (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Interviews were conducted via video call and recorded with the informant's consent to ensure accuracy in transcription and analysis.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected through an in-depth interview conducted online via a video call platform. Prior to the interview, the researcher contacted the informant to explain the purpose of the study, obtain informed consent, and schedule a mutually convenient time. The interview lasted approximately 15 to 30 minutes and was conducted in a conversational yet focused manner guided by the semi-structured interview protocol. The session was audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim to preserve the integrity of the informant's responses. Field notes were also taken during the interview to capture non-verbal cues, contextual observations, and emerging analytical reflections. Following the initial interview, member checking was conducted by sharing

key excerpts of the transcript with the informant to verify the accuracy of the data and reduce the risk of misinterpretation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the six-phase framework proposed by (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which involves familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. The transcribed interview data were read repeatedly to develop a thorough familiarity with the content, after which meaningful units of data were systematically coded. The analysis was conducted manually with the support of qualitative data organization tools to ensure systematic and transparent handling of the data. To enhance the trustworthiness of the analysis, the researcher employed triangulation by cross-referencing interview data with publicly available information about QM, such as product documentation and brand communications, in addition to the member checking process described above.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Characteristics of Informant

The primary informant in this study was Liani Wijaya, the founder and owner of QM, a turmeric-based skincare brand that has been operating for nearly twenty years in Indonesia. As the founding leader of the brand, she holds a central role in directing the company's innovation strategy, overseeing the product development process, and determining the overall business direction. Her nearly two decades of experience in the skincare industry position her as a key source of first-hand knowledge regarding the practice of innovative leadership and the transformation of a traditional Indonesian herbal ingredient, turmeric, into a modern, market-ready skincare product. Importantly, the informant's leadership journey illustrates a broader phenomenon in the Indonesian beauty industry, namely the increasingly visible role of women entrepreneurs who translate traditional herbal knowledge into commercially viable product innovation. The data presented in this section were derived from an in-depth interview conducted with the informant via an online platform, supported by documentary evidence concerning QM's products and its BPOM and Halal certifications. The interview data were analyzed thematically and organized into a coherent structure of themes and sub-themes, which form the basis of the discussion that follows.

Coding Result of Interview Data with Thematic Analysis

Following the thematic analysis approach proposed by (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the interview transcript was analyzed manually through the phases of familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, and defining and naming themes. The coding process organized the raw interview data into meaningful analytical units, which were

subsequently grouped into four broader thematic categories aligned with the research questions, namely innovative leadership practices, the product development process, the drivers and barriers of innovation, and the role of innovative leadership in product innovation and business development. The complete results of the coding process, including the translated representative data excerpts, are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Result of Thematic Coding of Interview Data

Code	Representative Data Excerpt (Translated)	Sub-theme	Theme
IL-01	"I want everyone, people from all walks of life, to be able to use my skincare."	Accessibility-driven vision	Innovative Leadership Practices
IL-02	"I always try to listen to their opinions and their input... every time we have a meeting, there must be a discussion."	Participative, listening-based leadership	Innovative Leadership Practices
IL-03	"I only state the concept: 'I want it like this, this, and this. Now, you are free to be creative.'"	Empowering team creativity	Innovative Leadership Practices
IL-04	"I first find out why it failed, where it failed... we keep researching, keep researching."	Constructive response to failure	Innovative Leadership Practices
PD-01	"Why turmeric? Because Indonesia is famous for its spices... it's an antioxidant, it has so many uses."	Local-resource-based ideation	Product Development Process
PD-02	"We must first test its safety on the skin... the cream texture, the feel, the thickness... the process took nearly two years."	Iterative testing and formulation	Product Development Process
PD-03	"We have our own R&D. We work together with a pharmacist. And the laboratory, of course, because we conduct testing."	Internal R&D and expert collaboration	Product Development Process
PD-04	"I have a QC team... all the raw materials that arrive are definitely quality-checked before we use them for production."	Quality control of raw materials	Product Development Process
PD-05	"It is very important... we need to know its effect on dry skin, combination skin, oily skin... to perfect	Customer feedback integration	Product Development Process

	QM."		
DB-01	"Listening. Receiving input, listening, accepting criticism. That is what can make the product perfect."	Driver: openness to feedback	Drivers and Barriers
DB-02	"The biggest obstacle is quality. When the quality we expect is not reached, we have to research again."	Barrier: quality attainment	Drivers and Barriers
DB-03	"The competition is not difficult. It is how to convince the market that this product is good. That is the difficult part."	Barrier: market persuasion	Drivers and Barriers
DB-04	"Find another way. We look for the best solution... keep turning it over, keep searching, until we find it."	Driver: resourcefulness	Drivers and Barriers
LB-01	"Very important. Because that is what will determine whether the next step succeeds or not."	Leadership as decisive factor	Leadership in Innovation & Business Development
LB-02	"In the past the competition was not so tight. Now the competition is fiercer... so we keep innovating."	Business model adaptation	Leadership in Innovation & Business Development
LB-03	"I want to go international. Like Mustika Ratu, but this one is called Liani Ratu."	Vision for business expansion	Leadership in Innovation & Business Development

Source: Processed data, 2025

Innovative Leadership Practices at QM

The findings reveal that the innovative leadership practiced by the founder of QM is fundamentally rooted in an accessibility-driven vision and a participative, listening-based leadership style. From the very inception of the brand, the founder articulated a clear purpose oriented toward inclusivity, expressing a strong desire to make quality skincare available to all segments of society regardless of their purchasing power. This is reflected in her statement, "*I want everyone, people from all walks of life, to be able to use my skincare*" (IL-01, Liani Wijaya). This vision is not merely a marketing position but functions as the guiding logic that shapes the direction of the company's innovation, influencing concrete decisions regarding product costing, formulation, and market positioning. Indeed, the founder consistently begins her product development decisions by considering affordability, reasoning that a product

which cannot be purchased by ordinary consumers would only serve a narrow segment of the market and would therefore fail to fulfil the brand's foundational mission. This demonstrates that, in the context of QM, the leader's personal vision operates as the primary frame through which all subsequent innovation decisions are evaluated.

The most dominant characteristic emerging from the data is the founder's persistent emphasis on listening as the very core of her leadership philosophy. Throughout the interview, the act of listening was repeatedly invoked, almost as a recurring motif, as the foundation of how she leads her team, generates new ideas, and drives the innovation process. She explained, "*I always try to listen to their opinions and their input... every time we have a meeting, there must be a discussion*" (IL-02, Liani Wijaya). This finding indicates that the leader deliberately and consciously cultivates a collaborative organizational environment in which ideas, suggestions, and feedback are allowed to circulate freely among team members. Rather than positioning herself as the sole source of authority and direction, she frames discussion and the exchange of opinions as essential and non-negotiable components of the company's internal processes. This pattern is strongly consistent with the view of Hughes et al. (2018), who argue that leadership influences innovation primarily by shaping the psychological and social conditions that make creative work possible, rather than by directly producing innovative outcomes itself. In QM's case, the founder's listening-based approach effectively constructs the psychological safety and openness that allow creativity to surface within her team.

Closely related to this listening orientation is the founder's empowering leadership style, which grants her team meaningful creative autonomy within a clearly defined conceptual framework. Rather than micromanaging or dictating tasks in exhaustive detail, the founder provides the overarching concept and direction, and then deliberately steps back to allow the team to develop and execute that concept according to their own creativity. She described this approach directly: "*I only state the concept: 'I want it like this, this, and this. Now, you are free to be creative*'" (IL-03, Liani Wijaya). This delegation of creative responsibility reflects a leadership posture that trusts the capabilities of the team while still maintaining strategic coherence through the leader's articulation of the guiding concept. This approach aligns closely with the framework of Cortes & Herrmann (2021), who conceptualize the innovative leader as someone whose primary role is to create the organizational conditions under which new ideas can emerge, be tested, and be carried through to implementation, rather than someone who merely directs day-to-day operations. The founder of QM thus exemplifies this conception by functioning less as an operational controller and more as an enabler of conditions conducive to innovation.

The founder's response to failure further reinforces this innovation-oriented leadership posture. Rather than treating unsuccessful experiments as terminal setbacks or reasons to abandon a product direction, she approaches failure analytically, seeking to diagnose its underlying causes and persisting through continued research and iteration. She articulated this mindset clearly: "*I first find out why it failed, where it failed... we keep researching, keep researching*" (IL-04, Liani Wijaya). This reflects a resilient, learning-oriented leadership disposition that treats failure as a valuable input to improvement rather than as a verdict on the viability of an idea. Such a disposition is particularly significant in the context of skincare innovation, where the formulation of new products inherently involves repeated trial and error before a stable and effective result is achieved. The founder's willingness to absorb the discomfort of failure and convert it into a stimulus for further research suggests that her leadership actively sustains the momentum of innovation even when the process does not unfold smoothly. This finding also resonates with the broader literature on women entrepreneurial leadership, which suggests that women leaders frequently exhibit transformational tendencies that inspire and motivate their teams through periods of uncertainty and change (Rozyeva, 2025).

The Development Process of Turmeric-Based Skincare Products

The development of QM's turmeric-based skincare products demonstrates a structured yet highly iterative innovation process that closely mirrors the sequential stages described in the product innovation literature. The ideation stage originated from the founder's deliberate recognition of Indonesia's rich endowment of natural resources, particularly turmeric, as a distinctive source of competitive differentiation and national pride. She explained the rationale behind this choice: "*Why turmeric? Because Indonesia is famous for its spices... it's an antioxidant, it has so many uses*" (PD-01, Liani Wijaya). This local-resource-based ideation reflects the argument advanced by Maier (2018), who notes that product innovation allows a company to gain competitive advantage by differentiating its production and increasing the quality and variety of goods, thereby growing demand and opening new growth opportunities. By anchoring the product concept in a culturally significant and locally abundant ingredient, the founder positioned QM to occupy a distinctive niche grounded in Indonesian identity, while simultaneously leveraging turmeric's recognized antioxidant and skin-beneficial properties as a substantive functional basis for the product line.

The implementation stage of QM's product development was characterized by extensive and meticulous testing and formulation, which the founder described as a demanding and protracted process spanning approximately two years. She elaborated on the multiple dimensions that had to be considered before a product could be deemed market-ready: "*We must first test its safety on the skin... the cream texture, the feel, the thickness... the process took nearly two years*" (PD-02,

Liani Wijaya). This account reveals that the development process was far from linear, involving numerous instances of failure and considerable periods of trial and error before a satisfactory result was achieved. The iterative nature of this process is strongly consistent with the framework of Adam & Cornescu (2019), who emphasize that the implementation stage encompasses both product development and product testing, and that testing should be conducted continuously rather than being restricted to a single isolated phase. The complexity of working with turmeric as a cosmetic ingredient, including the well-documented challenges associated with its texture, stability, and skin compatibility, further underscores the technical difficulty inherent in translating a raw traditional ingredient into a stable, safe, and commercially viable skincare product.

To manage this technical complexity, QM relies on robust internal research and development capabilities supported by expert collaboration and laboratory validation. The founder emphasized the company's possession of dedicated internal expertise: "*We have our own R&D. We work together with a pharmacist. And the laboratory, of course, because we conduct testing*" (PD-03, Liani Wijaya). This internal capacity is significant because it reflects what Ferreras-Méndez et al. (2021) describe as the organizational infrastructure through which a leader's entrepreneurial vision is systematically converted into market-ready offerings. In the absence of such internal R&D capabilities, the founder's vision for turmeric-based products would remain merely aspirational; it is the presence of these organizational mechanisms that enables the systematic translation of ideas into tangible products. Complementing this developmental capacity, the company also enforces rigorous quality control over its incoming raw materials, ensuring consistency and safety before materials enter the production process. The founder described this safeguard explicitly: "*I have a QC team... all the raw materials that arrive are definitely quality-checked before we use them for production*" (PD-04, Liani Wijaya). This emphasis on raw-material quality control reflects an awareness that the integrity of the final product is contingent upon the quality of its constituent inputs, a particularly salient concern when working with natural herbal ingredients whose properties may vary across batches.

A particularly salient and theoretically significant feature of QM's development process is the systematic integration of customer feedback as a central mechanism for product refinement. The founder regards consumer input as indispensable for understanding how products perform across diverse skin types, and she explicitly links this feedback to the ongoing perfection of the product line. She stated, "*It is very important... we need to know its effect on dry skin, combination skin, oily skin... to perfect QM*" (PD-05, Liani Wijaya). This finding strongly supports the argument of Adam & Cornescu (2019), who emphasize that the R&D team should give priority to customer feedback and to characteristics that bring value to the customer rather than to the product itself.

The founder's responsiveness to consumer experiences across different skin types illustrates a consumer-centric orientation in which the market is treated not as a passive recipient of finished products but as an active participant in the iterative improvement of those products. This orientation also resonates with the literature on women-led innovation in skincare marketing, which highlights that women entrepreneur often bring a close attentiveness to evolving consumer needs and relational communication into their product development practices.

Drivers and Barriers of Innovation at QM

The analysis identified both enabling and constraining factors that shape QM's innovation process, providing a nuanced understanding of the conditions under which the company's product innovation succeeds or encounters difficulty. The most prominent driver of innovation, according to the founder, is her consistent openness to feedback and her willingness to accept criticism, which she identifies as the decisive factor in achieving product excellence. She stated emphatically, "*Listening. Receiving input, listening, accepting criticism. That is what can make the product perfect*" (DB-01, Liani Wijaya). This reaffirms the centrality of listening within the founder's leadership philosophy, extending it from an internal team-management practice into a broader driver of innovation success. The repeated emphasis on listening across multiple thematic categories suggests that, for the founder, receptivity to external and internal input is not a peripheral managerial habit but a core engine of the company's capacity to innovate and improve.

A second important driver is the founder's resourcefulness in overcoming resource limitations, whether those limitations pertain to capital, human resources, or technology. Rather than allowing such constraints to halt the innovation process, she addresses them through persistent and determined problem-solving. She described her approach in vivid terms: "*Find another way. We look for the best solution... keep turning it over, keep searching, until we find it*" (DB-04, Liani Wijaya). This resourceful disposition reflects a broader entrepreneurial resilience that enables small, founder-led ventures to continue innovating despite the resource disadvantages they typically face relative to larger firms. The founder's refusal to be deterred by limited resources, and her insistence on continuing to search for solutions until one is found, exemplifies the kind of persistent agency that sustains innovation in resource-constrained environments.

In terms of barriers, the founder identified the attainment of consistent product quality as the most significant challenge in developing turmeric-based products. When the quality of a product does not meet expectations, the development process must be repeated and the formulation re-researched until a satisfactory result is achieved. She explained, "*The biggest obstacle is quality.*

When the quality we expect is not reached, we have to research again" (DB-02, Liani Wijaya). This barrier is closely tied to the technical difficulty of formulating with turmeric, and it helps to explain the lengthy two-year development timeline described earlier. The founder's insistence on not compromising on quality, even at the cost of repeated cycles of research and reformulation, reveals a quality-first orientation that, while time-consuming, ultimately strengthens the integrity and credibility of the final product.

A particularly noteworthy and somewhat counterintuitive finding concerns the nature of market competition. Contrary to the common assumption that competition itself constitutes the primary obstacle to a new product's success, the founder reframed the central challenge as one of market persuasion rather than market rivalry. After initially characterizing the competition as difficult, she revised her assessment and clarified the true nature of the obstacle: "*The competition is not difficult. It is how to convince the market that this product is good. That is the difficult part*" (DB-03, Liani Wijaya). She elaborated those consumers hold strong pre-existing brand preferences, and that the genuine difficulty lies in persuading these consumers of the value and efficacy of herbal-based products, which may not enjoy immediate trust in a market saturated with conventional alternatives. This insight is significant because it relocates the locus of the innovation challenge from the supply side, where the product is created, to the demand side, where the product must be accepted. This reframing resonates with the institutional perspective on innovation offered by Nicholas (2011), which emphasizes that the conditions surrounding the adoption and acceptance of an innovation, not merely its technical creation, are critical in shaping its ultimate success. It also aligns with the conceptual distinction drawn by Adam & Cornescu (2019) between invention and innovation, wherein a developed product attains the status of a true innovation only once it has been effectively adopted by consumers in the market. In this light, the founder's recognition that convincing the market is the hardest part demonstrates an intuitive grasp of the fact that commercialization, rather than mere creation, completes the innovation process.

Innovative Leadership in Product Innovation and Business Development

The findings collectively demonstrate that the founder's innovative leadership plays a decisive and arguably determinative role in shaping both the product innovation and the broader business development trajectory of QM. The founder herself regards her leadership as the single most important factor in the success of the company's innovation efforts, attributing to her own decisions the power to determine whether the company's next steps will succeed or fail. She stated unequivocally, "*Very important. Because that is what will determine whether the next step succeeds or not*" (LB-01, Liani Wijaya). This direct and unmediated linkage between the founder's decisions and the company's innovation outcomes is highly characteristic of small, founder-led ventures, where, as

Sattayaraksa & Boon-itt (2018) observe, a leader's style filters down through the organization before ultimately affecting innovation performance. In the case of QM, this chain of influence is especially short and direct, owing to the limited layers of management separating the founder from the product itself. Consequently, the founder's vision, values, and decision-making style become embedded almost immediately in the company's product decisions, amplifying the significance of her leadership for innovation outcomes.

The data also reveal clear evidence of business model adaptation undertaken in response to evolving competitive conditions in the skincare market. The founder candidly acknowledged that the intensification of competition over time has compelled the company to sustain and even accelerate its innovation efforts. She observed, "*In the past the competition was not so tight. Now the competition is fiercer... so we keep innovating*" (LB-02, Liani Wijaya). This adaptive response illustrates that innovation at QM is not a static, one-time achievement but an ongoing strategic necessity driven by external market pressures. This pattern aligns closely with the conceptualization advanced by Ferreras-Méndez et al. (2021), who describe business model innovation as a dynamic capability that helps firms sense new opportunities and seize them in order to maintain or improve their performance and competitiveness in the face of changing external conditions. The founder's recognition that intensifying competition demands continued innovation reflects an implicit understanding that the firm's survival and growth depend on its capacity to continually reconfigure and renew the way it creates and delivers value to its customers.

Finally, and perhaps most strikingly, the founder's innovative leadership is animated by a clear and ambitious long-term vision for business expansion, expressed through her aspiration to bring QM to the international market while remaining firmly grounded in Indonesian identity. She articulated this ambition through a concrete national point of reference, invoking an established Indonesian herbal beauty brand as her aspirational benchmark: "*I want to go international. Like Mustika Ratu, but this one is called Liani Ratu*" (LB-03, Liani Wijaya). This statement is revealing on multiple levels. It demonstrates that the founder's innovative leadership integrates the utilization of local resources, namely Indonesia's abundant spices and herbal ingredients, with a global strategic aspiration to position QM as an internationally recognized brand rooted in authentic Indonesian heritage. This finding reflects the broader literature on women entrepreneurial leadership, which suggests that women leaders often draw on personal and cultural experience as a direct source of product inspiration, enabling them to design offerings that feel authentic to the communities they serve rather than generically formulated for a mass market . Moreover, the founder's parting advice to other women entrepreneurs, encouraging them to be brave, to act decisively, and not to hesitate, further underscores the agentic and courageous orientation that characterizes her

leadership. In this sense, the founder's innovative leadership not only drives the immediate innovation of turmeric-based products but also charts a deliberate and culturally grounded strategic trajectory for QM's sustained growth, competitive positioning, and eventual international expansion. Taken together, these findings affirm that, within the context of a founder-led venture such as QM, innovative leadership functions as the central mechanism through which a traditional local ingredient is transformed into a modern, competitively positioned product, and through which a small Indonesian brand articulates and pursues an ambitious vision for the future.

CONCLUSION

This study employed a descriptive qualitative case study to examine the role of innovative leadership in developing turmeric-based skincare products at QM, an Indonesian women-led beauty brand. Data were collected through an in-depth interview with the founder and supported by documentation, then analysed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis. The findings indicate that QM's innovative leadership is characterized by a listening-oriented, participative, and empowering approach that drives continuous product improvement and team collaboration. Product development follows an iterative process supported by research and development, expert collaboration, quality control, and customer feedback. The main challenge lies in building consumer trust in herbal-based products rather than competing in the market. The study concludes that innovative leadership plays a pivotal role in transforming traditional herbal ingredients into competitive skincare products while supporting sustainable business development and adaptation to changing market conditions. Future studies are encouraged to examine innovative leadership using quantitative approaches and different research settings, including other herbal-based, women-led, or cross-industry enterprises, to enhance the generalizability of findings. For QM and similar local beauty businesses, strengthening a listening-oriented organizational culture, investing in research and development, and prioritizing consumer education and persuasive communication are recommended to improve product innovation and long-term business competitiveness.

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