

Original Article

Sociocultural Implications of the Kaamulan Festival on Indigenous Cultural Practices among Selected Communities in Bukidnon, Philippines

Amihan Liway Sagbigsal-Ayson , Jay Rey G. Alovera 

Author Information:

Department of Sociology, College of Arts and Social Sciences, Mindanao State University-Iligan Institute of Technology, Iligan City, Philippines

Corresponding Author:

Amihan Liway Sagbigsal-Ayson
amihanliway@gmail.com

Article History:

Date received: July 10, 2026
Date revised: September 1, 2026
Date accepted: September 11, 2026

Recommended citation:

Sagbigsal-Ayson, A.L., & Alovera, J.R. (2026). Sociocultural implications of the Kaamulan Festival on indigenous cultural practices among selected communities in Bukidnon, Philippines. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, 4(10), 264-273. <https://doi.org/10.69569/jip.2026.393x>

Abstract. Cultural festivals in the Philippines are widely recognized for their contributions to tourism and local economic development. However, scholarly attention has predominantly centered on business and economic outcomes, leaving the sociocultural implications for Indigenous communities underexplored. This study therefore examines the sociocultural implications of the Kaamulan Festival on Indigenous cultural practices among selected communities in Bukidnon, Philippines. Using a qualitative case study design, the study collected data through ten (10) key informant interviews with Indigenous leaders and five (5) focus group discussions involving twenty-four (24) community members. Data were analyzed through thematic analysis. Findings indicate that participants perceived the Kaamulan Festival as both a site of cultural affirmation and a space where cultural authority, representation, Indigenous cultural governance, and commercialization are negotiated and contested. Participants described the festival as a significant platform for reinforcing Indigenous pride, identity, and cultural sustainability, while also highlighting tensions as cultural practices are negotiated within institutional and tourism-oriented contexts. These dynamics reflect broader negotiations between heritage preservation and festival governance. The study concludes that strengthening meaningful consultation processes and ensuring adherence to customary protocols are essential to safeguarding Indigenous cultural integrity within institutionalized festival settings.

Keywords: Cultural festivals; Cultural hegemony; Indigenous cultural practices; Indigenous identity; Sociocultural implications.

Cultural festivals function as important sites for the expression and preservation of collective identity, particularly among Indigenous communities whose traditions are transmitted through performance, ritual, and symbolic practices (Getz, 2007; Odotei, 2002). In the Philippines, such festivals serve not only as cultural celebrations but also as public platforms through which Indigenous groups affirm historical narratives, strengthen communal pride, and sustain intangible heritage. One prominent example is the Kaamulan Festival in Bukidnon, an annual gathering that celebrates the province's seven officially recognized Indigenous tribes: Bukidnon, Higaonon, Manobo, Matigsalug, Talaandig, Tigwahanon, and Umayamnon. Deeply rooted in traditional practices, such as datanship rituals, ceremonial weddings, thanksgiving celebrations, and peace pacts, the festival is integral to the tribes' identity and cultural continuity (Provincial Government of Bukidnon, n.d.). Beyond its cultural significance, the Kaamulan Festival has long been recognized as a major provincial event that

contributes to local tourism and economic development. As Gonzales (2017) argues, festivals play an important role in reshaping a locality's image and positioning it on the tourism map, while Lupak and Vasiliv (2020) note that festival tourism contributes to economic growth by attracting visitors and generating income for local businesses. Through traditional street dancing, rituals, and presentation of distinct Indigenous cultural products and practices, the festival offers visitors opportunities to experience the rich cultural heritage of Bukidnon's Indigenous communities.

Although the Kaamulan Festival has been widely recognized for promoting Indigenous culture, tourism, and local economic development, critical studies examining its sociocultural implications remain limited. Existing research on cultural festivals has largely focused on tourism promotion and economic impact (Lopes & Hiray, 2024; Nyandoro, 2024; Lupak & Vasiliv, 2020; Gonzales, 2017) and has often been conducted within descriptive or managerial frameworks. While these approaches highlight the economic contributions of festivals, they tend to underexplore how processes of institutionalization, representation, and commercialization shape Indigenous cultural authority and traditional practices. Despite the prominence of the Kaamulan Festival as a provincial cultural celebration, there is a dearth of literature examining how Indigenous communities themselves interpret its sociocultural implications.

In addition, the growing emphasis on tourism promotion and economic development in cultural festivals has generated broader discussions and critiques regarding cultural commodification (Yamamoto & Collins, 2024; Luna et al., 2022; Richards, 2007). In the case of Kaamulan, these considerations invite closer examination of how Indigenous traditions are presented within a public festival context. As Platt and Finkel (2020) argue, the politicization and commercialization of festivals may affect communities and cultural identities. These concerns underscore the need to explore how Indigenous communities themselves understand the sociocultural implications of participating in the festival.

Addressing this gap requires a theoretical perspective that moves beyond tourism- and economics-oriented analyses to examine how power, cultural authority, and representation shape Indigenous cultural practices within festival settings. Drawing on Antonio Gramsci's (1971) concept of cultural hegemony, this study conceptualizes the Kaamulan Festival as a contested cultural space where institutional actors, development priorities, and Indigenous communities negotiate cultural authority and the representation of Indigenous heritage. Cultural hegemony serves as the primary analytical lens for examining how Indigenous cultural practices, including rituals, dances, attire, musical traditions, and ceremonial objects, are represented, regulated, and contested within the festival.

Two complementary perspectives extend this analysis. The festivalization of culture (Bennett et al., 2014) helps explain how cultural traditions may be restructured as they become incorporated into organized performances and increasingly shaped by institutional, entertainment, and commercial priorities. Postdevelopment theory situates these processes within broader debates on development and cultural sustainability. Rooted in Escobar's critique of Western development paradigms, postdevelopment challenges the assumption that modernization and economic growth are universal indicators of progress (Asher & Wainwright, 2019). This perspective underscores the importance of Indigenous agency and culturally grounded decision-making in shaping festival development. Taken together, these perspectives operate at distinct but interconnected levels: cultural hegemony examines power and cultural authority, festivalization of culture explains the restructuring of cultural practices within the festival setting, and postdevelopment interrogates the development priorities within which these processes occur.

Guided by these theoretical perspectives, this study examines the sociocultural implications of the Kaamulan Festival on Indigenous cultural practices among selected communities in Bukidnon. Specifically, it asks: How do Indigenous participants from selected communities perceive the sociocultural implications of the Kaamulan Festival on their cultural practices? The study contributes to the literature on cultural festivals and Indigenous studies by providing an in-depth examination of Indigenous experiences within an institutionalized festival context. In doing so, it contributes to ongoing discussions on cultural sustainability, festival governance, and Indigenous agency in contemporary cultural festivals. The study also aligns with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11, particularly Target 11.4, which calls for strengthening efforts to protect and safeguard cultural heritage and emphasizes the importance of ensuring that heritage preservation initiatives remain grounded in community participation and cultural integrity.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to examine the sociocultural implications of the Kaamulan Festival on Indigenous cultural practices among selected communities in Bukidnon. A case study enables an in-depth examination of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-world context (Yin, 2018). The Kaamulan Festival served as the case, an institutionalized cultural festival, and the study included ten selected Indigenous communities across Malaybalay City and the municipalities of Impasug-ong, Cabanglasan, Pangantucan, San Fernando, and Kitaotao in Bukidnon, Philippines. The researchers conducted interviews and focus group discussions with Indigenous participants from April to May 2025, focusing on their broader experiences and perceptions of the Kaamulan Festival. The researchers also conducted supplementary participant observation during the 2026 Kaamulan Festival to provide additional contextual understanding of the festival setting and cultural presentations.

Research Locale

The study was conducted in ten selected Indigenous communities in Bukidnon, Philippines. The Kaamulan Festival, the study's central context, is celebrated annually in Malaybalay City, Bukidnon's provincial capital. The participating communities represented the Bukidnon, Higaonon, Manobo, Matigsalug, Talaandig, Tigwahanon, and Umajamnon Indigenous groups. These communities were selected because their members and leaders had direct participation in and familiarity with the Kaamulan Festival, enabling them to provide culturally grounded accounts of its sociocultural implications for Indigenous cultural practices. To protect participant confidentiality, the study does not report specific community names.

Participants and Sampling Technique

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure individuals with relevant knowledge and experience could provide meaningful insights. The inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) possessing substantial knowledge of their community's cultural practices and traditions, and (2) having current or prior participation in the Kaamulan Festival as a leader, organizer, or community member. The researchers assessed substantial knowledge based on participants' recognized community roles, familiarity with cultural practices, and prior involvement in the Kaamulan Festival. Ten (10) Indigenous leaders participated in the key informant interviews (KIIs), comprising eight (8) males and two (2) females, aged 31 to 69 years old. Participants held various leadership positions within their respective communities, including Tribal Datu, Barangay Indigenous Peoples Mandatory Representative (IPMR), Barangay Chieftain, spiritual leader/Baylan, and Municipal Chieftain. Their involvement in the Kaamulan Festival included roles such as ritualists, parade and street dancing participants, dance trainers, and festival organizers. Their experience with the festival ranged from recent involvement to several decades of participation, providing perspectives across different levels and periods of engagement with the Kaamulan Festival.

The five focus group discussions (FGDs) involved 24 Indigenous community members. Two FGDs involved four and five participants from the broader Bukidnon Indigenous group, while the remaining three comprised seven Matigsalug, five Tigwahanon, and three Umajamnon participants. The participants ranged from youth to older adults. They included tribal elders, women, youth, handicraft weavers, cultural performers involved in street dancing and musical performances, and other community members who have participated in or experienced the Kaamulan Festival in various capacities. Their diverse community roles and festival experiences provided a broader range of perspectives on the festival's sociocultural implications.

Indigenous contacts facilitated participant recruitment by helping establish communication with communities whose members had participated in the Kaamulan Festival. Following permission from community leaders, individuals who met the inclusion criteria were invited to participate voluntarily in the study. Sample adequacy was assessed based on the relevance and depth of participants' accounts and recurrence of patterns across the key informant interviews and focus group discussions. The inclusion of Indigenous leaders and community members with varied roles and experiences in the Kaamulan Festival provided sufficiently diverse perspectives to address the research question.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers collected data through key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) from

April to May 2025. The researchers used separate guides for the KIIs and FGDs, with questions aligned with the study objective. The KII guide focused on Indigenous leaders' experiences and perspectives regarding the Kaamulan Festival, particularly their participation in the festival, changes in cultural practices and traditions, and perceived sociocultural implications. The FGD guide covered similar areas but focused on eliciting community members' shared and diverse experiences and perspectives regarding the festival.

Before data collection, the researchers secured community consent and observed customary protocols (Batasan) in coordination with community leaders. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, procedures, voluntary nature of participation, and ethical safeguards before written informed consent was obtained. The KIIs and FGDs were conducted face-to-face at locations within the respective communities that were accessible and acceptable to the participants. KIIs lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes, while FGDs lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes. The researchers facilitated both the interviews and FGDs and took field notes to document relevant observations and contextual information during the sessions. The researchers conducted the interviews and discussions primarily in Cebuano (Bisaya), a language spoken by both the researchers and participants. All sessions were audio-recorded with participants' consent. The researchers conducted no repeat or follow-up interviews. In addition to the interviews and FGDs, the researchers conducted supplementary participant observation during the 2026 Kaamulan Festival.

Data Analysis Procedure

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006). Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim in Cebuano (Visaya), and coding was conducted directly from the transcripts. Initial coding was inductive, with codes developed from the participants' accounts rather than from predetermined theoretical categories. First-cycle coding was followed by pattern coding (Saldaña, 2013), which grouped related codes into broader patterns across the data. As these patterns were developed, the KII and FGD data were compared to identify similarities and differences in the accounts of Indigenous leaders and community members. This comparison helped develop themes that reflected perspectives across both data sources.

The team reviewed, refined, defined, and named themes through an iterative, reflexive process. Although the initial coding was data-driven, the researchers' positionality and reflexive engagement with the data shaped how they interpreted and developed the emerging themes. After developing the themes, cultural hegemony, festivalization of culture, and postdevelopment served as interpretative lenses to explain and contextualize participants' accounts. Thus, the theoretical perspectives informed the interpretation of the findings rather than the generation of the initial codes. The researchers translated relevant excerpts into English when writing the findings. Culturally specific terms and expressions were also retained in their original form to preserve their cultural meanings, with contextual explanations provided where necessary.

Researcher Positionality and Trustworthiness

The researchers brought different but complementary positions to the study. The first researcher is from Bukidnon and has familiarity with the local sociocultural context and the Kaamulan Festival, while the second researcher specializes in Indigenous studies, providing a disciplinary perspective relevant to Indigenous cultures and communities. Both researchers are competent in Cebuano (Visaya), which facilitated direct communication with participants during the KIIs and FGDs. At the same time, the researchers recognized that their background, assumptions, and prior understandings could shape their interactions with participants. The researchers remained reflexive about these influences and how their positions could shape data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Research Integrity and Compliance Office (RICO) of Mindanao State University-Iligan Institute of Technology (MSU-IIT) prior to data collection (UERB Code: UERB-2025-00038; approved February 12, 2025). The researchers also secured formal permission from the Provincial Government Office (PGO) of Bukidnon. Given the involvement of Indigenous participants, the researchers formally coordinated with the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) Provincial Office. The study examined participants' experiences and perspectives regarding the sociocultural implications of the Kaamulan Festival, including the representation of Indigenous attire, cultural expressions, dances, music, and rituals. However, it did not seek to document or elicit restricted or sacred Indigenous knowledge or community-held traditional knowledge. Based on the study's scope, the NCIP Bukidnon Provincial Office advised that the research could proceed without undergoing the Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) process.

At the community level, the researchers obtained permission to conduct the study from the respective Indigenous community leaders before recruiting participants. We then obtained individual informed consent from all participants. Participants were informed of the study's purpose and procedures, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. The team protected anonymity and confidentiality by withholding names and other identifying information from the reported findings. The research team maintained cultural sensitivity by adhering to community protocols and respecting Indigenous customary practices throughout the research process. Participants received modest remuneration in recognition of their time and contribution to the study.

The researchers securely maintained research records, including audio recordings, transcripts, field notes, and coded data, and limited access to the research team to protect participant confidentiality. The study did not intentionally collect culturally sensitive or sacred knowledge. The team carefully considered any sensitive information that emerged during data collection for potential risk to participants and their communities before including it in the findings. The study did not include formal community validation. The study will share its findings with participating Indigenous communities and the Provincial Government of Bukidnon to inform future efforts toward a more Indigenous-centered Kaamulan Festival.

Results and Discussion

The analysis generated four interrelated themes that illuminate the sociocultural implications of the Kaamulan Festival for Indigenous communities in Bukidnon. Collectively, these themes reflect the festival's complex, negotiated character within its institutional and cultural context. The themes reveal an interconnected process in which the public expression of Indigenous culture reinforces identity and pride, while the institutional presentation of these traditions also generates tensions over representation, cultural authority, and sacred protocols. Commercialization, competition, and tourism-oriented promotion further shape these tensions, illustrating how cultural affirmation and cultural contestation coexist within the festival.

Cultural Pride and Identity Reinforcement

Ritual practices remain central to reinforcing Indigenous cultural identity. Participants emphasized the importance of conducting rituals during the festival as an act of respect toward spirits and a way to seek blessings for community protection. A recurring practice mentioned was *pagpananghid*, or seeking permission from spirits before commencing any activity.

"We must seek permission before performing because the history we present is sacred; you cannot simply name the spirits without asking, or you may disturb them" (KII-10).

"Kaamulan strengthens our rituals because this is where the tribe is shown. Through the festival, people recognize how we perform rituals for the water, the air, and the land. Its effect is good because our culture becomes more visible" (FGD1-P3).

Ritual practices are closely tied to Indigenous identity and remain central to the celebration of the Kaamulan, serving as a prerequisite affirmation before any activity. In Indigenous communities, religious beliefs and ritual practices form an integral part of cultural life and worldview, reflecting a symbiotic relationship with the divine realm (Layugan, 2024). Through these rituals, Kaamulan not only strengthens cultural visibility but also upholds spiritual accountability.

The findings reveal that participants perceived certain performances in the Kaamulan Festival as authentic expressions of their traditions, expressing shared pride in presenting traditional dances and cultural expressions.

"I feel great joy because the traditional dances are truly visible; they are authentic. You can clearly see the tribes's original dances" (FGD1-P2).

Participants also highlighted dancing barefoot during street performances as an expression of continuity with ancestral traditions: *"We perform barefoot because that is part of our ancestral culture; we do not wear slippers" (FGD3-P2).* Participants described these traditional dances as culturally grounded expressions of their heritage, particularly when they retained customary movements and practices. Maintaining barefoot performances and

traditional choreography reflects their conscious effort to sustain and reinforce ancestral heritage. Cultural festivals and performances function as mechanisms for the intergenerational transmission of intangible heritage (UNESCO, 2003) and serve as important platforms for fostering cultural continuity (Feng, 2024). In this sense, Kaamulan operates as a site for the transmission and expression of Indigenous traditions.

The Kaamulan Festival provides a significant avenue for Indigenous communities to express and publicly affirm their cultural identity through their Indigenous attire. Participants emphasized that specific patterns, colors, and designs embody deep-rooted meanings tied to social status, leadership, pride, and legitimacy within their respective communities. As one key informant explained, *"You can only wear that once you are a respected leader and you're part of the community... you really have to earn it"* (KII-01). Similarly, another participant underscored the role of attire as a marker of Indigenous identity, *"Each tribe has its own colors, and their designs have specific meanings. These serve as identifiers, showing whether someone is Higaonon, Talaandig, or Bukidnon. In this way, the colors of their attire reflect their tribal identity"* (KII-10). Public acknowledgment during the festival performances further reinforces this pride, *"Since we were the champions, our traditional attire was highlighted"* (FGD3-P1). The study's findings underscore that traditional attire is not merely symbolic for Indigenous communities; rather, it represents collective identity, earned authority, and cultural pride. For participants, celebrating the Kaamulan Festival provides a platform to showcase and strengthen their identity by bringing their distinct culture and practices into public view. These experiences resonate with Rabha's (2024) study, which emphasizes that traditional clothing marks cultural identity and heritage, differentiates one community from another, and sustains connections to ancestral roots and shared historical experiences.

Erosion of Cultural Authority and Misrepresentation of Cultural Practices

Alongside expressions of pride and cultural reinforcement, participants described a gradual erosion of cultural authority during the festival. This erosion was particularly evident in how Indigenous leaders criticized the wearing of Indigenous attire by political figures and non-Indigenous individuals without proper cultural standing. One participant argued:

"Political figures, or even common people, wear embroidered and ornamented traditional clothing. But the basic argument is: Did you earn that? Don't tell me you earned it just because you have the power. You did not earn it, you simply took the privilege" (KII-03).

The improper use of status-specific symbols, such as the *tangkulo* (head wrap), was similarly viewed as a disruption of established hierarchy. As one participant explained, even within their own community, its use is strictly regulated: *"Even I do not wear the tangkulo because it is strictly reserved for those of the highest rank. It is shocking to see someone wearing it"* (FGD4-P5).

The data revealed concerns that the festival has, in some ways, displaced traditional authority, as Indigenous clothing and sacred headdresses, which serve as markers of rank and earned legitimacy, were casually worn by political figures. The findings suggest that Indigenous leaders' experiences reflect processes of cultural hegemony (Gramsci, 1971), in which dominant political actors appropriate and normalize traditional status symbols, weakening customary systems that regulate legitimacy and authority in wearing sacred attire and headdresses. Consequently, this process extends beyond the misuse of traditional attire itself. By normalizing the unrestricted use of sacred cultural symbols, it weakens public recognition of Indigenous leadership and customary governance, leading the broader public to view these symbols as decorative rather than as markers of legitimate cultural authority.

The political dimension of heritage representation further supports this concern. Smith (2006) argued that heritage is often shaped by "authorized heritage discourse", where state and institutional actors influence what is officially recognized, represented, and legitimized as heritage. Within institutionalized festivals, cultural symbols may be framed as part of shared public heritage, even when they carry specific meanings tied to ranks, ritual, and spiritual responsibility within Indigenous communities. In this sense, although Kaamulan Festival enhances Indigenous visibility, participants expressed concern that the increasing political and institutional involvement may affect the regulation of sacred symbols and the preservation of customary legitimacy.

Alongside concerns over authority and symbolic recognition, cultural misrepresentation also emerged as a significant issue. Participants expressed related concerns across multiple accounts in both KIIs and FGDs,

although the specific forms of perceived misrepresentation varied. Participants raised concerns regarding visual elements they perceived as lacking grounding in Indigenous traditions, including face painting and the incorporation of designs and symbols with other cultural traditions. Participants from one Indigenous community, for example, questioned the use of face painting during the festival, describing it as a contemporary practice rather than part of their cultural tradition. As one community member explained during the FGD, *“Face painting does not belong to our tribe; it has become something practiced by millennials today”* (FGD1-P3). Similar concerns were raised regarding the incorporation of foreign symbols, as one Indigenous leader shared, *“And yet it is called Kaamulan, but the designs are Polynesian, the designs are Indian... the designs are already mixed together”* (KII-03).

Beyond visual elements, concerns regarding misrepresentation also extended to dances, music, chants, and cultural narratives. These concerns emerged across both interviews and FGDs, although participants identified different forms of inappropriate representation. Some Indigenous leaders raised concerns about sacred or traditional dances being performed outside their customary contexts or being presented with altered meanings. One Indigenous leader, for instance, questioned the presentation of *Dugsu* in festival performances, *“Why are you performing the Dugsu in these dances? You are implying to the audience, especially those who are not from Bukidnon, that it is acceptable to simply dance it?”* (KII-03). A similar concern was expressed by another Indigenous leader regarding the interpretation of a traditional dance, *“Some even said that what they performed was a fertility dance. For those of us who understand fertility dance, that feels wrong”* (KII-06). These accounts reflect participants’ concerns that traditional dances may be interpreted differently when presented outside their customary meanings and contexts. Participants described the *Dugsu*, for instance, as a sacred ritual dance traditionally performed during specific ceremonial occasions and before the *bangkasu* (sacred table).

Indigenous leaders likewise raised concerns regarding the representation of cultural narratives. Participants described instances in which they perceived elements added to historical narratives represented through festival performances, despite not forming part of their communities’ histories. One Indigenous leader explained:

“Our dances typically depict our history. What concerns us is that certain additions appear to have been incorporated, making it seem as though we are being misrepresented, since we were not part of that history, yet it is included in the performance” (KII-10).

Participants also raised concerns about the homogenization of distinct musical traditions, noting that dances traditionally accompanied by specific rhythms were performed to a single standardized beat. One FGD participant explained:

“During Kaamulan, the music has been standardized. Traditional dances have their own distinct music, but now everything seems merged into one. Although it is Indigenous music, it has already been mixed.” (FGD2-P1).

Some participants also raised concerns regarding chanting and the use of the *agung* (gong) during the ground performances, which they perceived as inconsistent with customary practice: *“Their chanting during the ground presentation is no longer done properly. I feel uneasy about what they are shouting... some are beating the agung as if invoking a mangayaw (a traditional form of armed conflict), which is not correct”* (KII-03). Other Indigenous leaders attributed these perceived alterations in some cultural performances and expressions to cultural trainers whom they considered insufficiently grounded in the historical and cultural meanings of the tradition being presented.

As contextual evidence beyond the 2025 interview and FGD dataset, a controversy reported during the 2026 Kaamulan Festival illustrates the broader concerns surrounding the representation and use of Indigenous cultural symbols. Indigenous garments and sacred cultural symbols were reportedly used as decorative elements in a lechon exhibit, drawing criticism, particularly over the reported use of the *“panika”*, a sacred Higaonon headgear traditionally reserved for ritual purposes (Echeminada, 2026). Beyond illustrating concerns over cultural misappropriation, the controversy became a platform for public criticism, cultural education, and calls for greater respect for Indigenous cultural protocols. The reported responses also illustrate how Indigenous communities publicly challenged the perceived misuse of sacred cultural symbols and asserted cultural authority over their appropriate use.

Together, these accounts show how cultural misrepresentation reshaped Indigenous cultural practices and expressions during the Kaamulan Festival. Although the festival is celebrated as a cultural event, inaccurate

portrayals of dances, music, and other cultural elements distort the meaning and integrity of these traditions. This dynamic may be understood through the framework of festivalization of culture (Bennett et al., 2014), which posits that when cultural practices are staged in festival settings, they are often simplified and restructured to fit performance and audience demands. This simplification, as described by Hafidhoh (2025), is selectively portrayed to align with global aesthetic and tourism branding, increasing the risk that cultural elements become detached from their deeper spiritual, historical, and authority structures within the Indigenous community. Participants' experiences at the Kaamulan Festival show how this process displaces Indigenous meanings from their cultural context.

Perceived Gaps in Consultation and Observance of Sacred Protocols

Participants raised concerns about the observance of consultation and Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) processes related to the representation and use of Indigenous cultural elements during the festival. One informant questioned whether appropriate consultation and consent mechanisms had been observed with tribal leaders and elders: *"Did they properly consult the tribe regarding the music they used? Did they ask the Datu? Was the FPIC secured? It seems done carelessly"* (KII-03). Moreover, participants raised concerns about individuals they perceived as lacking the customary standing or ritual preparation associated with the garments. One Indigenous leader explained:

"I have observed that during Kaamulan, many people wear tribal attire, even though such clothing requires undergoing a significant ritual. Some wear it without genuine belief in the culture. They like to wear the attire of a Datu yet do not participate in the ritual, which feels deeply insulting to the tribe" (KII-10).

Participants also described beliefs about the spiritual consequences of failing to observe sacred protocols, with several Indigenous leaders expressing that such practices could disturb ancestral and spiritual relations. One participant shared, *"Calamities occur because the spirits of our ancestors are angered when the proper way of celebrating Kaamulan is not followed. The correct practices have been disregarded"* (KII-08). Another participant similarly expressed the belief that wearing sacred garments without appropriate permission or ritual could result in spiritual harm or illnesses: *"The garments we wear are sacred, and there is a possibility of illness if someone wears them without proper permission"* (KII-10).

These accounts demonstrate that, for some participants, sacred protocols were closely connected to cultural authority and responsibility within the festival. Despite these concerns, participants continued to engage in the Kaamulan Festival, reflecting the complex relationship between safeguarding sacred cultural protocols and participating in an increasingly institutionalized festival. Taken together, participants' accounts point to tensions surrounding consultation and the governance of Indigenous cultural practices. Drawing on Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony, these tensions may reflect the relationship between institutional decision-making within the festival and customary Indigenous mechanisms of authority.

Commercialization and Performative Display of Indigenous Culture

Beyond concerns over cultural authority and representation, participants also described tensions surrounding the commercialization and performative display of Indigenous culture. Several Indigenous participants perceived these developments as affecting the cultural meanings attached to Indigenous traditions. Concerns regarding commodification were particularly evident in participants' accounts. One Indigenous leader expressed concern over the commercialization of culturally significant attire, noting that, *"the elements of our culture are being 'bastardized'... the salələy (traditional headdress) are being sold... they are just hung there and put up for sale"* (KII-03). The participant further perceived such commercialization as diminishing the dignity, morale, and cultural identity of the tribe.

Another Indigenous leader offered a different perspective, viewing the sale of Indigenous cultural products by non-Indigenous individuals as a form of cultural appreciation that could reflect genuine interest and respect for Indigenous culture:

"That is why they chose that kind of business, because they like it and are interested in it. If you take care in making and selling your products, it shows that you value them. It also suggests that you care about the culture, that you appreciate the tribe, and that, in a way, you have embraced and identified with the tribe, even if you are not a member of it" (KII-10).

Participants also raised concerns about the festival's increasingly performative character. Some perceived contemporary entertainment and spectacle as receiving greater prominence than traditional cultural expressions. As one Indigenous leader observed, *"It seems that this has turned into a festival, where contemporary concerts are more popular than the presentation of traditional songs, even though these traditions are what should be represented"* (KII-01). Another informant raised concerns about the participation of non-Indigenous individuals who wore Indigenous attire and performed cultural dances for promotion without sufficient knowledge of their cultural meanings: *"They are simply dancing to attract tourists, and merely using the tribe's costume... but if you ask them about the culture, they have no knowledge"* (KII-06).

Competition represented another dimension of this tension. Participants expressed concerns that competition and monetary incentives could influence how Indigenous cultural performances were presented. One Indigenous leader explained:

"Regardless of the quality of the dance, participation should not revolve around competition, as contests were not originally part of the tribal practice. Yet elements that should not be included are incorporated to win. Costumes are heavily adorned, and new movements are introduced simply to secure victory, because of the prize money" (KII-10).

From participants' perspectives, competition could encourage modifications intended to gain a competitive advantage rather than maintain customary forms of cultural expression. Concerns also extended to tensions associated with competition, with another participant describing how losing could generate frustration among participants: *"If you are truly grounded in your culture, you would not get angry if you lose in a competition, but some people really become angry when they lose"* (KII-01).

Through the lens of cultural hegemony (Gramsci, 1971), these findings may reflect the gradual normalization of market-oriented standards within the festival space. As commercialization, competition, and tourism-driven promotion become embedded in Kaamulan's structure, economic considerations may increasingly shape the presentation of Indigenous traditions, subtly framing audience appeal and prize-based recognition as legitimate standards for cultural expression. This interpretation resonates with Antolihao's (2014) discussion of cultural festivals, where increasing emphasis on aesthetic display and competition may shift attention away from the original essence of celebration. It also aligns with Escobar's postdevelopment perspective, which critiques how Western development models tend to reduce people and culture to abstract concepts and measurable outputs in the name of progress. Within neoliberal development strategies, profit generation and tourism revenue may become central priorities, facilitating the commodification and instrumentalization of culture (Getz, 2010; Richards, 2007).

In the context of the Kaamulan Festival, commercialization and performative display do not necessarily negate cultural expression, but they introduce tensions between economic promotion and cultural integrity. As Platt and Finkel (2020) argue, festivals that are increasingly politicized and commercialized for tourism and marketing purposes may struggle to balance economic objectives with communities' cultural needs. For Indigenous participants in this study, these dynamics raise concerns about dignity, identity, and preserving sacred traditions within an increasingly market-oriented festival environment.

Conclusion

The findings highlight the dual sociocultural implications of the Kaamulan Festival as perceived by Indigenous participants in Bukidnon, revealing it as both a site of cultural affirmation and a space of cultural tension. Participants described the Kaamulan Festival as strengthening Indigenous identity and pride through the visibility of cultural traditions and the transmission of intangible heritage, while also expressing concerns about Indigenous cultural governance, representation, commercialization, and adherence to sacred cultural protocols. Their accounts suggest that institutionalization and commodification may reshape cultural and power dynamics within the festival environment. Viewed through the lens of cultural hegemony, the Kaamulan Festival functions as an arena of symbolic negotiation, where cultural authority is not only displayed but also contested. Participants' accounts suggest that the growing treatment of Indigenous symbols as public heritage, particularly within institutionalized festival structures, may create tensions with customary systems of legitimacy and sacred protocol. Although participants perceived the festival as enhancing cultural visibility, their accounts also illustrate how institutional governance may shape the regulation and meaning of Indigenous cultural practices. At the same

time, their continued participation and assertion of cultural authority indicate that Kaamulan remains a meaningful space for Indigenous agency, reflecting the coexistence of cultural reinforcement and structural constraint. These findings have important implications for festival governance and cultural policy. Strengthening meaningful consultation with Indigenous communities and respecting customary protocols may help ensure that Indigenous cultural practices are represented in ways that remain consistent with their cultural meanings and systems of authority. Moreover, greater collaboration among festival organizers, local government units, Indigenous leaders, and relevant cultural institutions may help safeguard Indigenous cultural integrity.

This study has several limitations. The study focused on selected Indigenous communities and a single festival context, while the depth of evidence varied across participants; thus, the findings do not represent the full range of Indigenous perspectives on the Kaamulan Festival and should not be generalized to other cultural festivals. Translation from Cebuano to English and the researchers' positionalities may also have influenced the interpretation of participants' accounts despite efforts to preserve intended meanings and maintain reflexivity. Finally, the study centered on Indigenous perspectives and did not include festival organizers or government officials, limiting the analysis of institutional decision-making from multiple stakeholder perspectives. Future research may incorporate these perspectives, as well as those of tourists and cultural practitioners, to examine how institutional decision-making, tourism development, and Indigenous participation interact in shaping the future of the Kaamulan Festival. Comparative studies involving other Indigenous cultural festivals may also provide broader insights into the governance and representation of Indigenous cultural heritage.

Contributions of Authors

Author 1: conceptualization, data gathering, data analysis

Author 2: data analysis, supervision, review & editing

Funding

No funding was received for this research.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgment

The authors sincerely thank the study participants for their valuable time and participation in the research, and the Department of Sociology, Mindanao State University–Iligan Institute of Technology (MSU-IIT), for its institutional support.

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