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Strategic Quality Management and Operational Scaling in Digital Healthcare SMEs: A Case Study of Qaisar 99

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ABSTRACT

This case study investigates the operational workflows, Total Quality Management (TQM) frameworks, and brand protection strategies of Qaisar 99 (operating commercially as Kaasan 99), a Malaysian direct-to-consumer (D2C) healthcare enterprise specializing in natural herbal wellness remedies, specifically "USD Oil." Utilizing a primary qualitative field interview conducted with the company's General Manager, Haja, by academic interviewer Shazi, this paper analyzes how small-to-medium enterprises (SMEs) navigate multi-stage quality control, online customer consultations, digital counterfeit risks, and operational scaling within a lean 12-person organizational structure. Key findings demonstrate that integrating continuous quality control across four operational gateways (raw material screening, in-process monitoring, finished container inspection, and pre-dispatch logistics checks), quarterly workforce training, system-driven inventory management, and structured Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) are critical for maintaining high product efficacy, mitigating market risks, and sustaining customer trust.

Keywords: *Total Quality Management (TQM), E-Commerce Supply Chain, Brand Protection, Direct-to-Consumer (D2C) Healthcare*

Company Background

Qaisar 99 emerged in Malaysia from a simple but purposeful concern: people experiencing muscle pain, joint stiffness, and age-related physical discomfort should have access to a natural remedy they can use with confidence. Legally registered as a natural wellness enterprise, the company was established to address a perceived gap between conventional topical remedies and consumers seeking safer, chemical-free alternatives derived from carefully selected natural ingredients. From its beginning, Qaisar 99 was therefore conceived not merely as a commercial venture, but as an enterprise in which health, product integrity, and responsibility towards customers could be brought together.

At the centre of this aspiration is the company's flagship product, USD Oil, an all-natural herbal formulation developed for the relief of musculoskeletal discomfort. Its development reflected the founder's belief that a wellness product should not only be effective but should also provide users with a sense of assurance about what they are applying to their bodies. As Madam Haja explained during the interview: *"Qaisar 99 was formally established in accordance with business regulations. Our primary core offering is USD Oil, which was developed with the goal of providing high-quality herbal oils formulated from carefully selected natural ingredients. Our founder strongly believed in offering consumers a trusted, natural wellness solution that can be used safely every day without health concerns." (Madam Haja, personal interview, 12 May 2026)*

Her explanation reveals an important feature of the company: trust is embedded in the product philosophy itself. For Qaisar 99, natural ingredients are not presented merely as a marketing proposition. They represent an organisational commitment to amanah—the responsibility to ensure that what is offered to customers is consistent with what the company claims. Within an Islamic business environment, this understanding gives commercial activity a deeper meaning. Selling a wellness product is not simply an exchange between a seller and buyer; it carries an ethical obligation to avoid harm, maintain quality, and deal honestly with those who place their confidence in the company.

This Islamic atmosphere can also be understood through the way business purpose is framed. Discussions about products, customers, and growth are accompanied by an awareness that rezeki ultimately comes from Allah and that business itself is an amanah. The underlying sentiment is captured in the kind of reminder that shapes the organisation's outlook: *"We are not only selling oil; we are carrying the trust of the people who use it."* Such a perspective shifts attention from merely asking, "How much can we sell?" towards a more fundamental question*: "Are we offering something genuinely beneficial to people?"* Profit remains necessary for continuity and growth, but it is not detached from responsibility, service, and accountability.

The name Qaisar 99 consequently represents more than a business identity. Behind the bottles of USD Oil lies an organisational story built around natural wellness, customer confidence, and the aspiration to conduct enterprise within an Islamic ethical environment. The company's journey illustrates how a relatively focused product offering can carry a broader purpose: alleviating physical discomfort while pursuing lawful earnings, maintaining amanah, and creating value for others. In this setting, commercial success acquires significance when it is accompanied by ihsan in quality, honesty in dealing, care for human well-being, and consciousness that every business decision ultimately carries accountability before Allah.

Operations of Qaisar 99

Qaisar 99 operates through an integrated facility in which administration, production, quality control, marketing, customer service, and logistics are brought together under one roof. Although the enterprise maintains a relatively lean organisational structure of only 12 full-time employees, its operations involve multiple interconnected responsibilities that must function smoothly from product preparation to final delivery. Rather than viewing its small workforce as a limitation, the company strategically deploys employees across five cross-functional operational areas, allowing individuals to work closely, communicate quickly, and respond flexibly to changing business requirements.

Firstly, Executive Operations and General Management provide the overall direction of the enterprise by coordinating corporate strategy, financial planning, operational priorities, and key organisational decisions. In a small enterprise such as Qaisar 99, management cannot remain distant from everyday operations; leaders need to understand what is happening across production, marketing, customer service, and administration. As one might hear in the workplace, “We are a small team, so everyone must understand where the company is going and what needs to be done.” This close involvement enables management to align resources with business priorities while ensuring that different functions do not operate independently from one another.

Secondly, Administration and Compliance provide the organisational discipline required to ensure that daily business activities remain properly documented and aligned with relevant regulatory requirements. This function oversees corporate records, administrative procedures, facility matters, and compliance-related documentation, thereby providing an important foundation for the company's legitimacy and continuity. Within the organisation, compliance is treated not simply as paperwork but as part of responsible business conduct: “When the business is properly managed and the records are in order, we can work with greater confidence.” Such administrative discipline is particularly important for a wellness enterprise because customer trust depends not only on the product but also on confidence that the company operates responsibly and systematically.

Thirdly, Marketing and Digital Acquisition serve as the principal bridge connecting Qaisar 99 with its increasingly digital customer base. The team manages media buying, develops promotional content, conducts live-streaming activities, and coordinates the company's presence across digital marketplaces and social-media platforms such as Shopee, TikTok, and Facebook. Marketing therefore involves more than displaying USD Oil to potential buyers; employees must communicate its intended uses clearly, respond to enquiries, educate prospective customers, and maintain engagement in a highly competitive online environment. The underlying philosophy is straightforward: “People must first understand the product before they can develop confidence in using it.” Digital engagement thus functions simultaneously as a mechanism for customer acquisition, product education, and relationship building.

Fourthly, Customer Consultation and Service occupy an especially important position because wellness products often generate questions that cannot be addressed through advertising alone. Before purchase, employees listen to customers' concerns, provide appropriate product information and application guidance, and help them understand how USD Oil is intended to be used; after purchase, the same function assists with order tracking, enquiries, feedback, and complaint resolution. This creates a more personal interaction between the enterprise and its customers, reflecting the belief that “Our responsibility does not end when the customer makes payment; we still have to take care of them afterwards.” Customer service therefore becomes an extension of the company's commitment to amanah, where maintaining trust requires attentiveness before, during, and after a transaction.

Finally, Production, Quality Control, and Fulfilment transform the company's promise of natural wellness into the physical product received by customers. The process begins with the inspection of raw materials and continues through extraction monitoring, preparation, bottling, quality checking, leak testing, packaging, and eventual dispatch through courier services. Each stage requires attention because even a seemingly minor defect—a loose cap, leaking bottle, inappropriate packaging, or inconsistent product condition—can undermine the confidence that the company has worked to establish. The operational principle can therefore be expressed simply: "Quality is not checked only at the end; it has to be protected throughout the process." In this sense, production and quality control are not merely technical functions but practical expressions of ihsan and amanah, requiring employees to perform their responsibilities carefully because the final product will eventually be used by another person.

In short, these five operational areas demonstrate how Qaisar 99 converts a lean workforce into an interconnected organisational system. Management provides direction, administration establishes discipline, digital marketing creates market connections, customer service nurtures relationships, and production and quality control ensure that organisational promises are translated into reliable products. The proximity of these functions within a single facility encourages frequent interaction and rapid coordination, creating an environment in which employees can see how their individual responsibilities contribute to the wider purpose of the enterprise. For Qaisar 99, therefore, being small does not necessarily mean operating informally; rather, its organisational strength lies in connecting purpose, people, and process so that different functions work towards a common direction.

Market Segmentation and Positioning

Qaisar 99 occupies an interesting position between two worlds: the long-established familiarity of traditional herbal remedies and the speed and convenience of the contemporary digital marketplace. USD Oil is positioned not simply as another topical wellness product, but as a natural alternative for consumers who are increasingly conscious of what they apply to their bodies. In this sense, the company brings the traditional appeal of herbal care into a modern purchasing environment where customers can discover a product through digital content, ask questions online, place an order within minutes, and have it delivered directly to their homes. As the market evolves, Qaisar 99 seeks to preserve the sense of familiarity associated with herbal remedies while making the customer journey easier, faster, and more accessible. Within this broad market, two customer groups have become particularly significant.

Firstly, senior citizens and elderly consumers represent an important customer segment because physical discomfort often becomes part of their everyday experience. For these customers, joint stiffness, reduced mobility, arthritis-related discomfort, and age-related muscular aches are not occasional inconveniences; they can influence how comfortably a person walks, performs household activities, attends the mosque, gardens, sleeps, or simply moves through the day. Their concerns are therefore highly practical: "Can I use this regularly? Is it gentle? Will it help me move more comfortably?" Such questions reveal that elderly consumers are not necessarily searching for complicated wellness solutions. Many are looking for something natural, convenient, and sufficiently reassuring to become part of their daily self-care routine.

The needs of this segment also make trust especially important. Older consumers may already be familiar with traditional oils and herbal preparations, but familiarity alone does not guarantee purchase; they still want confidence in the ingredients, quality, and reliability of the product. For Qaisar 99, the challenge is therefore to combine the emotional familiarity of traditional herbal care with the quality expectations of today's more informed consumer. The desired customer reaction is not merely, "This reminds me of the oils people used in the past," but rather, "This is natural, properly prepared, and something I feel comfortable using regularly." This distinction strengthens USD Oil's positioning as a contemporary natural wellness product rather than simply another traditional remedy.

Secondly, active adults and natural-wellness seekers constitute a younger and behaviourally different market segment. This group includes office employees spending long hours in front of computers, drivers remaining seated for extended periods, entrepreneurs working irregular hours, physically demanding workers, and active individuals experiencing muscle fatigue after exercise. Their discomfort may emerge differently from that of elderly customers—a stiff shoulder after a day at the computer, an aching back after driving, tired legs after standing throughout a work shift, or sore muscles after physical activity. At the end of a demanding day, the concern can be very immediate: "My body is tired, but I still have things to do tomorrow." For such consumers, convenience and ease of application become important components of the product's value.

This second segment is also characterised by a deliberate interest in natural wellness alternatives. Some consumers increasingly scrutinise product ingredients and prefer to minimise unnecessary reliance on synthetic topical formulations when a suitable natural option is available. Their purchasing question is therefore not only "Does it work?" but also "What am I actually putting on my body?" Qaisar 99 responds to this concern by emphasising USD Oil's natural formulation and positioning it as a practical companion for everyday physical recovery. The product consequently speaks to a lifestyle in which wellness is not reserved for illness or old age but forms part of maintaining an active and productive daily routine.

Finally, the strategic significance of these two segments lies in their differences as much as in what they share. An elderly customer experiencing persistent knee stiffness and a younger employee suffering from shoulder tension after hours of screen work may appear to belong to completely different markets, yet both are ultimately seeking comfort, convenience, confidence, and a natural approach to everyday physical well-being. Qaisar 99 connects these needs through a positioning strategy that combines the familiarity of herbal wellness with the accessibility of contemporary digital commerce. Traditional knowledge provides the product narrative, while modern e-commerce enables that narrative to travel beyond geographical boundaries and reach customers directly.

This creates a distinctive market proposition for Qaisar 99: traditional in inspiration, contemporary in delivery, and personal in customer engagement. The company is not merely putting a bottle of herbal oil onto an online marketplace; it is translating an established culture of natural self-care into a form that fits modern lifestyles. Whether the customer is an elderly person seeking greater comfort in everyday movement or a working adult returning home with an aching body, the underlying message remains relatable: “Take care of the body that carries you through your day.” In this way, Qaisar 99 positions USD Oil at the intersection of natural wellness, changing consumer preferences, and digital convenience.

Product Portfolio

The product portfolio of Qaisar 99 reflects an effort to move beyond the conventional understanding of wellness products as purely commercial offerings. Each product is developed around the idea that what enters or is applied to the human body should be beneficial, trustworthy, and consistent with the principles of *halalan tayyiban*. This philosophy is particularly significant within an Islamic business environment, where product quality is connected not only to customer satisfaction but also to amanah and accountability before Allah. The management therefore views product development as requiring attention to ingredients, production, intended benefits, and the ethical integrity of the entire process. As expressed in discussions surrounding product development, “We do not want customers simply to buy our products; we want them to feel confident about what they are using and consuming.” Consultation and discussion with *halalan tayyiban* experts and Shariah experts further provide guidance in assuring that product decisions remain sensitive to Islamic requirements and the aspiration for barakah in production and consumption.

The USD Oil, as the flagship product of Qaisar 99, represents the clearest expression of this philosophy. Developed as a topical herbal oil, it is intended to support users experiencing acute or chronic muscular discomfort, joint discomfort, and everyday physical soreness. Its principal attraction lies in its formulation based on 100 per cent natural botanical extracts with zero synthetic additives, combined with controlled viscosity designed to facilitate convenient application and rapid skin absorption. Rather than presenting USD Oil simply as “another massage oil,” the company seeks to differentiate it through the combination of natural formulation, product quality, and ease of everyday use. The proposition is simple but meaningful: *“When the body is tired and uncomfortable, the solution should provide comfort without creating another worry about what is being applied to the body.”* This gives USD Oil a distinctive position for customers who value both physical comfort and greater confidence in natural ingredients.

The unique selling proposition of USD Oil is therefore grounded in naturalness, functionality, and trust. A customer may arrive home after a long working day with tired shoulders, an elderly parent may experience stiffness when moving around the house, or an active individual may feel muscular soreness following strenuous activity. These are different situations, yet they converge on a similar expectation: “I want something convenient that I can apply when I need it, and I want to know what I am putting on my body.” USD Oil responds to this concern by combining traditional appreciation for botanical remedies with a more systematic approach to formulation and quality. The bottle thus represents more than its physical contents; it carries the company's promise that natural wellness should be accessible, practical, and trustworthy.

Alongside the flagship oil, Sus, the company's secondary product line, extends the Qaisar 99 wellness proposition from external application towards broader bodily wellness support. Presented as a liquid wellness supplement, Sus is formulated using natural active ingredients and is positioned as a complementary offering to topical wellness care. Whereas USD Oil focuses on external application to areas of physical discomfort, Sus broadens the company's proposition towards a more holistic understanding of well-being. The two products are therefore not treated as isolated items competing for customer attention. Instead, they reflect a complementary philosophy in which Qaisar 99 seeks to support customers through different dimensions of natural wellness.

The attraction of Sus lies particularly in this complementary wellness proposition. Customers increasingly seek solutions that fit into their daily routines rather than products that are disconnected from their broader lifestyle. Within this context, Sus enables Qaisar 99 to communicate a more comprehensive message: caring for oneself involves attention not only to external physical discomfort but also to overall bodily well-being. As the philosophy may be expressed, “Wellness should not begin only when the body starts hurting; taking care of ourselves should become part of everyday life.” This allows Sus to occupy a distinct position within the portfolio while remaining closely connected to the quality philosophy established through USD Oil.

Importantly, for an enterprise operating within an Islamic environment, the question of product quality extends beyond whether a formulation is natural or commercially attractive. The management's engagement and consultation with *halal, tayyiban*, and Shariah experts provides an additional layer of deliberation concerning ingredients, sourcing, processing, handling, product claims, and consumption. Such consultation reflects an understanding that halal establishes an essential boundary, while *tayyiban* draws attention to goodness, wholesomeness, cleanliness, safety, and quality. In product discussions, therefore, the question should not stop at “Can we sell this?” but extend to “Is it permissible, is it good, is it beneficial, and are we comfortable being accountable for what we offer?” This transforms Shariah consultation from a procedural exercise into part of the company's product-development consciousness.

The aspiration towards *barakah* adds a further spiritual dimension to the portfolio. From an Islamic perspective, *barakah* cannot simply be manufactured, packaged, or claimed as a technical product attribute; rather, it is sought from Allah through lawful conduct, good intentions, responsible effort, honesty, and avoidance of doubtful or harmful practices. Qaisar 99's attention to *halalan tayyiban* principles can therefore be understood as part of its effort to create the conditions through which the business seeks Allah's pleasure and barakah in its activities. The underlying sentiment is powerful: *“We want goodness not only in what we earn, but also in what our customers receive and consume.”* Product quality, ethical sourcing, Shariah sensitivity, customer well-being, and responsible consumption consequently become interconnected rather than separate organisational concerns.

Thus, the two product categories enable Qaisar 99 to construct a portfolio around natural wellness with an Islamic ethical consciousness. USD Oil provides the flagship proposition of natural topical care for muscular and joint discomfort, while Sus extends the offering towards complementary and holistic wellness support. Their differentiation lies not merely in product format but in the roles they play within the customer's wellness journey—one providing topical care and the other broadening the approach towards bodily well-being. Table 1 summarises the Qaisar 99 product portfolio, including the respective product formats, target indications, and principal formulation characteristics. Through these offerings, the company seeks to connect natural ingredients, product efficacy, halalan tayyiban, amanah, customer well-being, and the pursuit of barakah within a unified approach to responsible wellness enterprise

Table 1: Product Portfolio

Product Line	Format	Target Indication	Formulation Characteristics
USD Oil *(Flagship)*	Topical Herbal Oil	Acute/chronic muscle pain, joint discomfort, physical soreness	100% natural botanical extracts; zero synthetic additives; controlled viscosity for rapid skin absorption
Sus *(Secondary Line)*	Liquid Wellness Supplement	Holistic bodily support; complements topical therapy	Formulated using natural active ingredients aligned with USD Oil quality standards

Total Quality Management: When Quality Becomes Everyone's Responsibility

For Qaisar 99, quality begins long before a bottle of USD Oil reaches the customer's hands. It starts with the selection of ingredients, continues through extraction and blending, follows the product into bottling and packaging, and remains important even when the parcel is handed to the courier. This reflects the philosophy of Total Quality Management (TQM), an organisation-wide approach that emphasises continuous improvement, employee participation, process discipline, and customer satisfaction (Deming, 1986; Oakland, 2014). Yet Qaisar 99 does not attempt to reproduce the elaborate quality systems of large corporations. As a resource-conscious SME with a lean workforce, it translates classical TQM principles into a practical philosophy: quality must be simple enough for everyone to practise, but rigorous enough that customers can experience the difference.

This understanding changes an important question within the organisation. Instead of asking only, "Did the product pass the final inspection?", employees are encouraged to ask, "Was quality protected at every stage?" A perfectly formulated herbal oil can still disappoint a customer if its bottle leaks during delivery; similarly, attractive packaging cannot compensate for inconsistent formulation or poor customer service. Quality, therefore, is not confined to the production room. It travels with the product—from ingredients to formulation, from bottle to parcel, and ultimately from the company to the customer's experience.

Four Pillars of Product Quality

Qaisar 99 translates this philosophy into four interconnected dimensions: safety, efficacy, reliability, and consistency. Together, these dimensions provide employees with a practical understanding of what the company means when it speaks about a "quality product." More importantly, they remind the organisation that quality cannot be reduced to appearance alone. A bottle may look perfect on the outside, but genuine quality requires confidence in what is inside, how consistently it has been prepared, and whether it reaches the customer in the condition intended.

Firstly, safety forms the foundation of product quality. Because USD Oil is applied directly to the body, the company places strong emphasis on its natural formulation and avoidance of synthetic additives, alongside controls intended to minimise product-related risks. The principle is straightforward: “Before asking whether customers like the product, we must first be confident about what we are giving them.” This makes safety an expression of amanah as much as a technical quality requirement. Customers entrust the company with something that will be applied to their bodies, and that trust creates a responsibility to pay careful attention to ingredients, preparation, cleanliness, handling, and appropriate product information.

Secondly, efficacy concerns whether the product performs consistently according to its intended purpose. Customers do not purchase USD Oil simply because the bottle is attractive or because the ingredients are natural; they purchase it because they expect the product to provide the intended wellness support for muscular and joint discomfort. Qaisar 99 therefore pays attention to the concentration and preparation of its botanical ingredients so that one production batch does not differ unnecessarily from another. The customer's expectation can be expressed simply: “If this bottle works well for me, I expect the next bottle to give me the same experience.” Efficacy consequently links formulation discipline directly to customer confidence.

Thirdly, reliability extends quality beyond formulation to the physical integrity of the product and its packaging. In an e-commerce environment, a high-quality herbal oil is of little value if it arrives with a loose cap, damaged seal, or leaking bottle. Imagine a customer eagerly opening a parcel only to discover that the oil has leaked throughout the packaging—the disappointment is not merely logistical; it immediately affects perceptions of the brand. Qaisar 99 therefore treats bottle integrity, cap security, sealing, and transit readiness as integral elements of product quality. The lesson is compelling: quality must survive the journey, not merely the production line.

Finally, consistency ensures that customers encounter essentially the same expected product characteristics each time they purchase. Batch-to-batch variations in viscosity, herbal aroma, visual clarity, or absorption characteristics can create uncertainty even when no fundamental defect exists. For a repeat customer, familiarity itself becomes part of quality: “This looks, feels, and applies like the USD Oil I purchased previously.” Qaisar 99 therefore seeks standardisation across production runs so that quality does not depend on which employee prepared a particular batch or on which day it was manufactured. Consistency transforms a successful product from a one-time achievement into a repeatable organisational capability.

These four dimensions reinforce one another. Safety without efficacy may produce a product that customers do not value; efficacy without consistency can weaken repeat-purchase confidence; and excellent formulation without reliable packaging can still create a poor customer experience. Qaisar 99 therefore approaches quality as an integrated promise: safe to use as intended, effective for its intended wellness purpose, reliable throughout handling and delivery, and consistent from one batch to another.

Multi-Stage Quality Control Gateways

To translate this promise into everyday practice, Qaisar 99 employs a four-stage Quality Control (QC) gateway system, as illustrated in Figure 2: Quality Control Gateways. Rather than waiting until production has been completed to discover mistakes, the system attempts to identify problems at the point where they are most likely to occur. Each gateway effectively asks a different question: Are the ingredients acceptable? Is the process being performed correctly? Is the finished product physically sound? Is the correct product ready to reach the correct customer? Quality control therefore becomes a sequence of preventive checkpoints rather than a single inspection at the end.

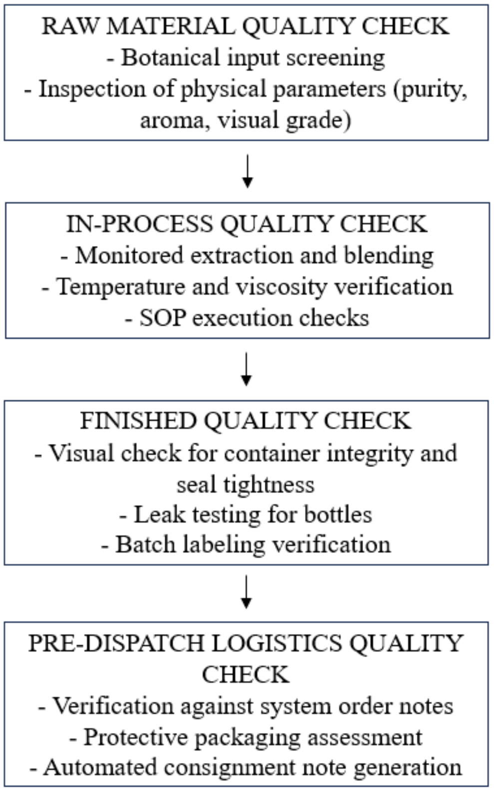

Figure 2: Quality Control Gateways

Firstly, the Raw Material Quality Check acts as the entrance gate to production. Botanical inputs are screened before they are incorporated into the product, with attention given to characteristics such as purity, aroma, physical condition, and visual quality. This stage reflects a simple production truth: a company cannot consistently produce a high-quality herbal product from unsuitable raw materials. Employees therefore have an obligation to identify questionable inputs early rather than allowing them to move further into the process. In practical terms, "If the ingredient is not right at the beginning, do not expect quality to magically appear at the end."

Secondly, the In-Process Quality Check protects the product while it is being made. During extraction, blending, and related preparation activities, employees follow established procedures and monitor relevant processing parameters such as temperature, viscosity, extraction conditions, and ingredient blending. This stage is particularly important because some production errors may not be easily corrected once a batch has been completed. Quality control therefore occurs while employees can still intervene. The production floor becomes a place of active observation: "Check while doing, not only after finishing." Such discipline embodies the preventive philosophy at the heart of TQM.

Thirdly, the Finished Product Quality Check begins when manufacturing has been completed but before the product is released for fulfilment. Attention shifts from formulation to the physical condition of each finished unit, including bottle integrity, seal tightness, possible leakage, visual appearance, and batch labelling. A seemingly small defect is taken seriously because the customer does not distinguish between a “production problem” and a “packaging problem”—to the customer, both represent Qaisar 99. The critical question at this stage is therefore, “Would we be comfortable receiving this exact bottle ourselves?” If the answer is uncertain, the product should not proceed unquestioned to the customer.

Finally, the Pre-Dispatch Logistics Quality Check creates the final bridge between manufacturing quality and customer experience. Products ready for shipment are cross-checked against digital order information to verify product and order accuracy, while protective packaging is examined for suitability before courier collection. Consignment information is then generated through the integrated order-processing system, reducing opportunities for manual fulfilment errors. This final checkpoint is important because even a perfectly manufactured product can become a quality failure when the wrong quantity is packed, an incorrect address is processed, or insufficient protection results in transit damage. In Qaisar 99's system, the last quality inspector is effectively standing at the customer's doorstep before the parcel even leaves the facility.

Standard Operating Procedures: Turning Good Intentions into Repeatable Quality
Behind these QC gateways are the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) that provide the operational backbone of Qaisar 99. Good intentions alone cannot guarantee consistent quality, particularly as order volumes increase and different employees become involved in the same workflow. SOPs translate organisational expectations into repeatable actions so that quality is less dependent on individual memory or personal preference. In a lean SME, this is particularly valuable because employees often perform multiple responsibilities. The principle is straightforward: “Everyone may have experience, but everyone must still follow the agreed process.”

Firstly, manufacturing SOPs standardise critical production activities, including extraction duration, ingredient blending ratios, filling levels, and procedures for securing bottle caps. Such specifications reduce unnecessary variation and make it easier to identify where a problem originated when an irregularity occurs. An employee should not decide that “today I will do it slightly differently because this is how I prefer it.” Instead, organisational knowledge is embedded within the process. Standardisation therefore does not remove employee skill; it channels that skill towards producing a dependable outcome.

Secondly, customer-service SOPs bring the same quality discipline to human interaction. Qaisar 99 standardises important elements of customer responses, complaint handling, escalation, and return or refund procedures so that service quality does not depend entirely on which employee happens to answer the message. A disappointed customer should not receive warmth from one employee and indifference from another. At the same time, standardisation should not turn employees into robots reading scripts without empathy. The aim is to create a dependable service foundation while retaining the human conversation that distinguishes the company's consultation-first approach: “Listen first, understand the concern, explain clearly, and then solve what can reasonably be solved.”

More importantly, customer complaints become an important source of continuous improvement within this TQM framework. A leaking bottle may reveal a packaging weakness; repeated questions about application may indicate that instructions need greater clarity; fulfilment errors may expose weaknesses in order verification. Instead of viewing such feedback merely as criticism, Qaisar 99 can treat it as a form of operational intelligence. The useful managerial question is not "Who should we blame?" but "What in the process allowed this to happen, and how can we prevent it from happening again?" This converts individual customer experiences into organisational learning.

Ultimately, Qaisar 99's approach demonstrates how TQM can be adapted to the realities of a small enterprise without becoming bureaucratically burdensome. Its quality philosophy connects people, products, processes, technology, and customers through preventive controls and continuous attention to improvement. Quality begins with ingredients, is protected during production, examined in the finished product, verified before dispatch, and tested again through the customer's experience and feedback. In an Islamic organisational setting, this discipline can also be understood through amanah and ihsan: doing what has been entrusted properly and continually striving to perform it better. The philosophy may therefore be captured in one memorable expression: "Quality is not something we inspect into the bottle at the end; it is something we put into every action from the beginning."

Supply Chain Risks, Counterfeiting, and Brand Protection

As Qaisar 99 expanded its presence in the digital marketplace, e-commerce created an important paradox. The same platforms that enabled the company to reach customers quickly and economically also made it easier for unauthorised sellers to imitate its products, reproduce its marketing materials, and compete primarily through unusually low prices. For a small wellness enterprise, this represents more than lost sales. A counterfeit bottle carrying the appearance of USD Oil can travel through the market under the Qaisar 99 identity, meaning that someone else may manufacture the imitation, but the genuine brand may ultimately carry the blame.

The Counterfeit Threat in the Digital Ecosystem

The problem became particularly concerning when counterfeit operators began reproducing elements associated with genuine USD Oil, including bottle appearance, labels, and online promotional materials. To an experienced customer, subtle differences might be noticeable, but to a first-time purchaser scrolling rapidly through an online marketplace, the imitation can appear convincing. Price then becomes the attraction: "It looks almost the same, so why should I pay more?" The customer may believe that he or she has discovered a bargain, without realising that the lower price may come with uncertainty regarding ingredients, formulation, handling, storage, and product origin.

Madam Haja described how this problem eventually reaches the genuine company's customer-service team: *"Customers who inadvertently purchase fake products often notice a lack of results or a difference in texture, leading them to reach out to our customer support team. Because we operate an e-commerce model, bargain-seeking shoppers can be misled by unauthorized sellers offering lower prices. We address this by educating our customer base on identifying authentic products and purchasing directly through our official channels." (Madam Haja, personal interview, 12 May 2026)*

Her observation reveals why counterfeiting creates an unusually complex quality problem. A customer may unknowingly purchase an imitation from an unauthorised seller, experience a different texture or disappointing performance, and then complain directly to Qaisar 99 because the bottle appears to carry the brand's identity. From the customer's perspective, "I bought USD Oil, and it did not work as I expected." From the company's perspective, however, "That was not the product we manufactured." Between these two perceptions lies a potentially damaging gap in trust.

The consequences can become even more serious when counterfeit formulations contain inferior or inappropriate materials. Because Qaisar 99 does not control their ingredients or manufacturing conditions, such products introduce uncertainties regarding quality and consumer safety. Yet customers may not distinguish the counterfeit producer from the authentic brand when something goes wrong. Negative reviews, complaints, requests for refunds, and adverse word-of-mouth may consequently be directed towards Qaisar 99. Counterfeiting therefore represents a three-dimensional threat: revenue is diverted, customer confidence is weakened, and the authentic brand becomes exposed to quality failures it did not create.

This distinction is illustrated in Table 2: Analytical Breakdown: Authentic vs. Counterfeit USD Oil. The comparison highlights differences across raw-material sourcing, viscosity and texture, intended product performance, and packaging and verification.

Table 2: Analytical Breakdown: Authentic vs. Counterfeit USD Oil

Evaluation Attribute	Genuine USD Oil (Qaisar 99)	Counterfeit Knockoff	Operational & Brand Impact
Raw Material Sourcing	Selected botanical extracts; high-purity natural carrier base.	Low-grade mineral oils blended with synthetic industrial fragrances.	Counterfeits create risks of dermatological inflammation or allergic reactions.
Viscosity & Texture	Stable viscosity; rapid, non-greasy dermal absorption.	Inconsistent density; greasy residue; phase separation over time.	Destroys consumer confidence in product claims.
Therapeutic Efficacy	Proven local pain relief via active botanical compounds.	Zero therapeutic effect; placebo at best.	Results in brand erosion, negative public reviews, and lost customer lifetime value.
Packaging & Verification	Automated consignment documentation; official platform storefront seals.	Mismatched batch codes; flimsy secondary packaging; no digital tracking integration.	Generates customer service overload due to misdirected complaints.

More importantly, the table demonstrates that counterfeiting is not simply a matter of copying a bottle. It creates operational consequences extending from customer safety and service workload to negative reviews, customer retention, and long-term brand equity. In other words, the real cost of a fake product may be much greater than the value of the sale that Qaisar 99 loses.

Brand Protection: Protecting More Than a Logo
Qaisar 99 consequently treats brand protection as an operational responsibility rather than merely a marketing or legal concern. The objective is not only to tell customers that counterfeit products exist but to make authentication easier before a purchase occurs. The company approaches this through three mutually reinforcing mechanisms: consumer education, control of official sales channels, and digital order traceability. Together, these measures attempt to shift customers from "I think this is genuine" towards "I know where this product came from."

Firstly, consumer education and media warnings form the frontline of brand protection. Qaisar 99 uses its digital communication channels to educate customers about recognising genuine products, checking packaging characteristics, identifying official storefronts, and being cautious when encountering suspiciously low prices. This is especially important because counterfeiters often exploit information asymmetry: they know that their product is fake, while the buyer does not. The company therefore seeks to equip customers with a simple purchasing habit: "Before looking only at the price, look at who is selling the product." An informed customer becomes, in effect, another layer of protection surrounding the brand.

Secondly, Qaisar 99 strengthens channel control by encouraging consumers to purchase through its directly managed digital storefronts. Rather than allowing the authenticity question to remain uncertain across an uncontrolled network of resellers, customers are directed towards the company's recognised channels on Shopee, TikTok, and Facebook. The strategic message is straightforward: "If you want the genuine product, begin with the genuine source." This direct-to-consumer orientation also provides Qaisar 99 with greater control over pricing communication, customer consultation, product information, fulfilment, and post-purchase support.

Thirdly, automated logistics traceability adds a technological layer to authenticity assurance. Genuine orders processed through the company's system are linked to official order and courier information, enabling customers to receive consignment details and follow the movement of their parcels. Traceability therefore performs two functions simultaneously: it improves logistical convenience and creates evidence connecting the purchase to the legitimate Qaisar 99 fulfilment process. Instead of authenticity depending entirely on the visual appearance of a bottle—which counterfeiters can attempt to imitate—the purchasing journey itself becomes part of verification. The genuine product is supported by a genuine digital trail.

Together, these measures create a layered defence. Packaging helps identify the product, education helps identify suspicious offers, official channels establish the legitimate seller, and digital traceability helps establish the journey from order to delivery. This is especially important because brand protection in e-commerce cannot depend upon a single security feature. Counterfeiters adapt; therefore, the company's protection strategy must also continue to learn and adapt.

Service Recovery: When a Complaint Becomes an Opportunity to Learn
Not every dissatisfied customer, however, has purchased a counterfeit product. Sometimes the problem is genuinely operational—a courier delay, damaged packaging, bottle leakage, an incorrect order, or another service failure. Qaisar 99 therefore integrates service recovery with its quality-management system, recognising that the way a company responds when something goes wrong can be as important as how it performs when everything goes right. A complaint is not

approached merely as an interruption to daily work. It provides an opportunity to ask, "What happened to this customer, what caused it, and what must we change so that it does not happen again?"

Firstly, the process begins by acknowledging and listening to the customer. When a complaint arrives through WhatsApp, Facebook, or another service channel, employees are expected to understand the concern before attempting to defend the company or propose a solution. A customer reporting, "My parcel arrived, but the bottle leaked inside the package," is already disappointed; an argumentative response would only create a second failure on top of the first. The initial objective is therefore to communicate, in effect, "We hear your concern. Let us first understand what happened." Empathy becomes the starting point of problem resolution.

Secondly, the team conducts a root-cause assessment rather than treating every complaint in the same manner. A missing parcel may originate from courier operations; leakage may indicate a packaging or handling weakness; an unexpected product texture may require batch verification; and an unfamiliar bottle purchased from another seller may indicate counterfeiting. Identifying the actual source is critical because the wrong diagnosis produces the wrong corrective action. The question moves from "How quickly can we close this complaint?" to the more useful "Why did this happen?"

Thirdly, once the cause is understood, Qaisar 99 seeks a prompt and appropriate resolution. Depending on the circumstances, this may involve replacement, compensation, clarification, or another suitable corrective response. Speed matters because unresolved frustration grows with time, particularly in digital commerce where disappointed consumers can publicly share their experiences almost immediately. Effective service recovery therefore aims not merely to settle a transaction but to restore confidence. A customer who initially says, "I am disappointed," should ideally leave the interaction thinking, "At least they took my problem seriously and solved it responsibly."

Finally, complaints are fed back into organisational learning rather than disappearing after individual cases are closed. Customer feedback is documented and reviewed so that recurring problems can inform improvements to packaging, logistics, customer service, or relevant SOPs. This creates a closed-loop quality process: complaint → investigation → resolution → learning → process improvement. The customer therefore becomes an unexpected contributor to operational improvement. What initially appears to be a service problem can reveal a weakness that internal employees may not have noticed.

A particularly useful example emerged from customer feedback concerning bottle leakage during rough courier handling. Instead of repeatedly replacing leaking bottles while leaving the underlying problem untouched, Qaisar 99 responded by revisiting its packaging procedure. Standard padded mailers were replaced with more protective reinforced corrugated boxes to improve resistance to the physical stresses of transportation. The significance of this response lies not merely in changing a box. It illustrates TQM in action: the customer identified the symptom, investigation exposed the vulnerability, and the organisation changed the process.

Ultimately, counterfeiting and service failures confront Qaisar 99 with two very different challenges, but both revolve around the same organisational asset—trust. Counterfeiters threaten trust by placing another product behind the company's identity, while genuine operational failures threaten trust when Qaisar 99 itself falls short of customer expectations. Brand protection therefore cannot stop with logos, labels, and warnings. It requires authentic products, controlled channels, traceable transactions, responsive customer service, and continuous learning. For a wellness SME operating in a crowded digital marketplace, the principle is compelling: protecting the brand means protecting the customer's confidence in every bottle that carries its name.

Performance Measurement, People Development, and the Journey Towards Sustainable Quality

As Qaisar 99 grew from a natural wellness enterprise into an increasingly structured digital business, management encountered a familiar SME dilemma: how can a small team remain personal and flexible without allowing informality to weaken performance? With only 12 full-time employees, every individual matters. One delayed production task can affect courier collection; one improperly sealed bottle can trigger a complaint; one unanswered customer message can become a lost sale. Performance management at Qaisar 99 therefore developed not as an exercise in producing numbers for management reports, but as a practical way of keeping people, processes, quality, and customers moving in the same direction. The underlying message is simple: "We may be a small team, but every person's work contributes directly to what the customer eventually experiences."

Making Performance Visible Through Departmental KPIs

The company translates this philosophy into function-specific Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Rather than imposing the same measurement on everyone, Qaisar 99 connects each KPI to the operational responsibility of the employee concerned. Production personnel are measured by output, quality-control employees by defects and leakage, marketing specialists by revenue contribution, and customer-service personnel by responsiveness. In this way, employees can see not only what they are expected to achieve but why their particular target matters to the larger organisation. A number on a KPI sheet consequently becomes part of a much bigger operational story.

Firstly, production performance is measured through daily output volume, with a baseline of at least two master boxes packed during the morning shift. At first glance, this may appear to be merely a productivity target. Operationally, however, the timing matters because products must be ready before afternoon courier collection. The production conversation is therefore not simply, "How many boxes have we packed today?" but, "Are we sufficiently prepared before the courier arrives?" Meeting the morning target creates a stock buffer, reduces last-minute pressure, and allows the fulfilment process to proceed more predictably.

Secondly, packaging and quality-control performance is governed by an uncompromising expectation: zero loose caps and zero transit leakage. Here, the KPI carries a powerful reminder that a small packaging defect can undo the work performed by everyone before it. Marketing may have successfully attracted the customer, consultation may have established trust, production may have prepared the product correctly, and logistics may have dispatched it promptly—but a leaking bottle can still define the entire experience. The QC employee therefore stands at a critical point in the customer journey. The question before a parcel leaves is almost personal: “Would I be satisfied if this exact package arrived at my own home?”

Thirdly, marketing specialists are expected to contribute approximately RM30,000 in monthly revenue individually. This target connects creative digital activity with measurable commercial outcomes. Videos, advertisements, livestreams, customer engagement, and promotional campaigns cannot be assessed merely by how attractive they look or how many views they generate; ultimately, marketing expenditure must contribute towards sustainable revenue. Yet the target also creates an interesting balance. Employees must sell, but the consultation-oriented philosophy of Qaisar 99 requires them to avoid reducing customers to sales figures. The challenge becomes: “How do we achieve the target while still ensuring that customers understand what they are purchasing?”

Finally, customer-service employees work towards an initial response time of less than 15 minutes during business hours. In digital commerce, fifteen minutes can make a significant difference. A prospective customer asking about USD Oil may simultaneously be comparing several alternatives, and prolonged silence can quickly turn curiosity into abandonment. Yet speed alone is insufficient; a rapid but careless answer can be equally damaging. The real standard is therefore speed with attentiveness—respond quickly, listen carefully, provide appropriate information, and help the customer make an informed decision.

Taken together, these KPIs create an interconnected performance chain. Production prepares the stock, QC protects its integrity, marketing creates demand, and customer service converts attention into relationships. Failure at one point can affect every subsequent activity. The system therefore reminds employees that “my KPI” is never entirely individual; each person's performance contributes to “our customer experience.”

Developing People, Not Merely Measuring Them

Qaisar 99 also recognises that setting demanding targets without developing employee capability would eventually become counterproductive. Performance measurement therefore operates alongside continuous employee development, consistent with Crosby's (1979) emphasis on employee participation in quality management. Quarterly training provides opportunities for employees to update technical knowledge, develop digital capabilities, strengthen communication skills, and learn across functional boundaries. For a 12-person SME, cross-training is especially valuable because organisational resilience depends on people understanding more than the narrow boundaries of their own job descriptions.

One area of growing importance is digital literacy and automation. As order processing, inventory control, customer communication, and marketing become increasingly technology-enabled, employees need confidence in using digital management systems and emerging AI-assisted tools appropriately. The conversation has shifted from “Can technology replace what we are doing?” towards “How can technology help us do our work better?” Automation can handle repetitive processes, but employees remain responsible for judgement, customer understanding, problem-solving, and the personal interaction central to Qaisar 99's consultative model. Technology therefore complements rather than eliminates the human element.

Training in good manufacturing hygiene reinforces another fundamental lesson: natural products still require disciplined production practices. Employees periodically revisit raw-material handling, sanitation procedures, contamination prevention, and production cleanliness. Familiarity can sometimes create complacency—"We have done this hundreds of times; we already know how." Refresher training challenges that assumption by reminding employees that consistency comes precisely from continuing to perform familiar activities correctly. In quality management, repetition should strengthen discipline rather than weaken attention.

Equally important is training in de-escalation and customer communication. A customer contacting the company angrily about a delayed parcel, leaking bottle, or suspected counterfeit product requires more than a scripted response. Employees need to listen without becoming defensive, distinguish facts from emotions, investigate the problem, and communicate a reasonable solution. The guiding attitude becomes: "Do not fight the complaint; understand what the complaint is telling us." Such skills transform customer service from an administrative function into an important component of brand protection and organisational learning.

When Practice Meets Theory: Deming's PDCA Cycle

Viewed academically, what happens inside this small Malaysian enterprise reflects several established quality-management theories. Deming's Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle is particularly visible in the rhythm of everyday operations. Management plans by establishing monthly sales expectations, production requirements, inventory thresholds, and resource needs. Employees then do by producing batches, processing orders, consulting customers, conducting digital marketing, and dispatching products according to established SOPs.

The organisation subsequently checks what happened rather than simply assuming that the plan worked. Revenue performance, complaints, stock levels, response times, packaging defects, and leakage incidents provide evidence of where expectations were achieved and where gaps remain. Management then acts on that information by modifying packaging, adjusting marketing strategies, revising procedures, improving systems, or providing additional employee training. The cycle therefore never really ends. Today's solution becomes tomorrow's practice, which is measured again when new evidence emerges.

The earlier leakage problem illustrates this vividly. Customers complained, management investigated, packaging weakness was identified, and the company moved towards stronger protective boxes. The lesson was not hidden inside a textbook diagram—it arrived at the company in a damaged parcel. PDCA became real because customer feedback forced the organisation to plan, act, evaluate, and improve.

Juran's Quality Trilogy: Planning, Controlling, and Improving

Joseph Juran's Quality Trilogy (Juran, 1999) provides another useful way of understanding the Qaisar 99 system. Quality planning begins with identifying customer needs and translating them into product characteristics and service processes. The development of natural wellness products for defined customer groups, combined with a consultation-first digital sales process, illustrates how customer expectations influence operational design.

Quality control then protects these intentions through raw-material checks, in-process monitoring, filling and packaging verification, and pre-dispatch inspection. Each checkpoint essentially asks, "Are we still delivering what we originally promised?" Finally, quality improvement occurs when evidence reveals that existing systems can perform better. Upgrades to order-management software, inventory systems, packaging procedures, logistics coordination, and employee capability show that Qaisar 99 does not regard the current operating model as permanently complete. Quality becomes a moving target: once one weakness is solved, attention shifts to the next opportunity for improvement.

SERVQUAL: Putting the Customer Back at the Centre

The SERVQUAL perspective (Parasuraman et al., 1988) brings the discussion back to the person waiting on the other side of the digital screen. Responsiveness appears in the company's target of replying to initial customer enquiries within 15 minutes during business hours. Reliability is reflected in efforts to maintain consistent product characteristics and dependable fulfilment, while empathy becomes visible when employees listen to customers, provide consultation, investigate complaints, and offer appropriate service recovery.

These dimensions matter because customers rarely experience organisational departments separately. They do not say, "Production performed well, but logistics failed." They simply remember, "My experience with Qaisar 99 was good," or "My experience was disappointing." SERVQUAL therefore reinforces an important lesson running throughout the company: every employee may perform a different task, but all of them participate in producing a single customer experience.

Towards the Next Chapter of Qaisar 99

Standing behind these systems, KPIs, SOPs, training programmes, digital platforms, quality gateways, and customer conversations is a much larger ambition. Madam Haja described the direction clearly: *"Over the next three to five years, we aim to expand our natural wellness product line, improve operational efficiency, and become a recognized leader in the regional affordable healthcare sector." (Madam Haja, personal interview, 12 May 2026)*

The aspiration is ambitious for a company with only 12 employees. Expansion will mean more customers, more orders, more production, more digital interactions, and potentially more pressure on the very systems that have enabled Qaisar 99 to grow. The challenge is therefore not merely whether the company can become bigger, but whether its quality philosophy, customer intimacy, employee commitment, product integrity, and operational discipline can grow with it.

One can imagine the discussion around the management table as the company considers its next stage. "If orders double, can our production system cope?" someone might ask. Another concern follows: "Can we still respond to customers within fifteen minutes?" Then comes perhaps the most important question: "As we grow, can we preserve the trust that brought customers to us in the first place?"

That question brings the Qaisar 99 story full circle. The company began with a natural wellness proposition, but its journey has increasingly become a story about quality, trust, people, systems, and continuous improvement. USD Oil may be the product customers hold in their hands, yet behind every bottle stands a network of decisions—someone selecting ingredients, someone monitoring production, someone tightening the cap, someone answering a WhatsApp message, someone checking the parcel, and someone asking how the process might be improved tomorrow.

For Qaisar 99, therefore, the next three to five years present both an opportunity and a managerial dilemma. Growth may open the door to regional recognition, a broader product portfolio, technological sophistication, and greater market reach. Yet sustainable growth will depend on ensuring that efficiency does not replace empathy, sales targets do not compromise trust, automation does not eliminate meaningful customer relationships, and expansion does not weaken quality.

As another working day ends and the final parcels leave for their customers, the central question facing Qaisar 99 is no longer simply, "How many bottles can we sell?" It is a more demanding question: *"How far can we grow while ensuring that every bottle still carries the quality, trust, care, and responsibility upon which Qaisar 99 was built?"*

That is where the present story closes—and where the company's next chapter begins.

Discussion Questions

Question 1: Operational Scaling and Capacity Planning
Qaisar 99 expects a 300% increase in daily orders from Southeast Asian expansion. Evaluate its current operational capacity and recommend strategies for production, inventory, and facility management to support growth without compromising quality.

Question 2: Anti-Counterfeiting and Supply Chain Technology
Counterfeit USD Oil continues to threaten Qaisar 99's brand and customer trust. Recommend a suitable technology to improve product authentication and traceability, considering the costs and benefits for an SME.

Question 3: TQM and Formal Quality Certification
Qaisar 99 is considering ISO 9001 and GMP certification for expansion into major pharmacy chains. Discuss the benefits and challenges of formal quality certification and how the company can maintain operational agility.

Question 4: Automation and Consultative Service Quality
Qaisar 99 is considering AI chatbots to manage increasing customer enquiries. Using the SERVQUAL framework, evaluate the benefits and risks of automation and recommend a hybrid model that balances technology with empathetic human service.

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