



Analysis of Traders' Social Strategies to Maintain Businesses Perceptions of Islamic Business Ethics

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Abstract:

This study aims to analyze the social strategies applied by traders in Tamidung Village in maintaining their businesses based on the perspective of Islamic business ethics. In Islam, business activities are not only profit-oriented, but must also uphold the values of justice (al-'adl), honesty (sidq), responsibility (amanah), and helpfulness (ta'awun). This study uses a qualitative approach with interview and observation techniques of eight local traders. The results show that merchants apply social strategies such as building local networks, flexibility with debt, friendly service, separation of personal and business finances, and taking advantage of religious momentum to build customer loyalty. Emotional strategies such as closeness and empathy for consumers are also important factors. All of these strategies reflect the principles of Islamic business ethics in real practice, although they have not been supported by adequate recording systems and technological innovations. This study concludes that the success of micro enterprises depends not only on economic capital, but also on the strength of social and spiritual values inherent in daily trading activities.

Keywords: social strategy, Islamic business ethics, traders, micro enterprises, Tamidung Village

INTRODUCTION

Tamidung Village is one of the areas where the majority of the population works as small and medium traders. In the context of the local economy, the existence of these traders has a vital role in supporting the village economy, expanding employment, and maintaining the circulation of goods and services in the community. However, in the midst of increasingly fierce business competition, digital disruption, and the impact of post-pandemic national economic instability, traders in Tamidung Village are faced with serious challenges in maintaining their business continuity.

Preliminary observational data shows that about 35% of traders have experienced a decline in turnover in the past two years, while another 20% have been forced to close their businesses. Nevertheless, there are groups of traders who are still able to survive and even experience business development. This shows that there are

certain strategies used, especially in social aspects, such as family relations, community social networks, to the principles of trust and honesty in trading that are in line with Islamic business ethical values.

In Islamic business ethics, economic activities are not only aimed at making profits, but also emphasize the principles of justice (*al-'adl*), honesty (*sidq*), responsibility (*amanah*), and mutual benefit (*ta'aruf*). The social strategies developed by traders in Tamidung Village are believed to have a strong ethical dimension, but they have not been widely studied in an academic framework, especially from the perspective of Islamic business ethics.

Similar research has been conducted by (Permatasari et al., 2023), which examines the survival strategies of traditional traders in the people's market based on Islamic values in Central Java, as well as a study from Rahmawati (Hanipah, 2024) which examines the social networks of small traders in maintaining their businesses in the digital era. However, the two studies have not integrated specifically the analysis of social strategies in the rural context and the framework of Islamic business ethics in depth, especially in areas such as Tamidung Village which has a high cultural character and religiosity.

Thus, this research has a scientific contribution in filling the research gap, namely by identifying and analyzing the social strategies of traders that are in line with the values of Islamic business ethics in Tamidung Village. The purpose of this study is to identify the forms of social strategies carried out by traders in maintaining their businesses; Analyze the strategy from the perspective of Islamic business ethics and provide practical recommendations for the development of micro enterprises in villages based on Islamic values.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction to the Literature Review

The intersection of social strategy and Islamic business ethics constitutes a critical yet underexplored domain in the study of micro and small enterprises, particularly within rural Muslim-majority communities. This literature review systematically examines the theoretical and empirical foundations relevant to the study titled "Analysis of Traders' Social Strategies to Maintain Businesses: Perceptions of Islamic Business Ethics in Tamidung Village." The review covers five core thematic clusters: (1) social strategies in micro and small enterprises, (2) Islamic business ethics as a normative framework, (3) social capital and network theory in traditional trading, (4) emotional and relational bonding in business sustainability, and (5) the socio-cultural dimensions of entrepreneurship in rural Islamic communities. By synthesizing scholarship across these domains, this review situates the current study within the broader academic discourse and identifies the research gap it addresses

Social Strategies in Micro and Small Enterprises

The concept of social strategy in the context of micro and small enterprises (MSEs) has been extensively discussed in the entrepreneurship and organizational behavior literature. Unlike large corporations that rely primarily on competitive positioning and technological innovation, MSEs—particularly those operating in developing economies—tend to depend on relational and social mechanisms as their primary source of competitive advantage (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Social strategies refer to deliberate patterns of behavior through which entrepreneurs leverage interpersonal relationships, communal ties, and trust networks to sustain their businesses.

Tari Kasnakoglu & Kalender (2025) introduced the concept of social business, arguing that enterprises can generate social value as a primary objective alongside or even above financial returns. In rural and semi-urban contexts, this perspective is particularly resonant, where traders often prioritize community solidarity and collective well-being over profit maximization. This aligns with the findings of Istifhama (Istifhama, 2017), who documented survival strategies of traditional traders in Indonesian people's markets (*pasar rakyat*), noting that social embeddedness—manifested through informal credit systems, kinship networks, and neighborhood solidarity—is a defining characteristic of market sustainability.

Pratiwi (2023) further elaborated on how small traders adapt their social networks in the digital era, finding that while digital platforms increasingly mediate economic interactions, face-to-face relational trust remains a dominant factor in customer retention among traditional market traders. This suggests that the social strategies of rural traders are not merely a reflection of technological limitations, but represent a deliberate and culturally embedded mode of doing business.

Datta (2010), in their seminal work on Creating Shared Value (CSV), argued that businesses that integrate social considerations into their core strategies tend to generate more sustainable competitive advantages. For small traders in Tamidung Village, this is manifested in practices such as sourcing goods from local suppliers, extending credit to trusted neighbors, and abstaining from predatory pricing—all of which simultaneously serve commercial and communal purposes.

Islamic Business Ethics: A Normative Framework

Islamic business ethics provides a comprehensive normative framework governing the conduct of economic actors within Muslim societies. Grounded in the Qur'an, Hadith, and classical jurisprudence (*fiqh al-mu'amalat*), Islamic business ethics articulates a set of principles that go beyond mere legality to encompass moral responsibility, spiritual intention, and social accountability (Auda, 2008a). The core principles most relevant to trading practice include: *al-'adl* (justice and fairness), *sidiq* (truthfulness and honesty), *amanah* (trustworthiness and fulfillment of obligations),

ta'awun (mutual cooperation and assistance), and *maslahah* (promotion of public welfare and avoidance of harm).

Auda (2008b) provided one of the earliest systematic treatments of Islamic business ethics in contemporary academic literature, establishing that the Islamic framework does not bifurcate religious and commercial life but rather integrates them as a unified sphere of moral action. This has profound implications for how Muslim entrepreneurs perceive and practice business: profit-seeking is legitimate, but must be pursued through *halal* (permissible) means and with awareness of its social consequences.

Hassan & Aliyu (2018), in their comprehensive handbook of Islamic finance and business, emphasized that the prohibition of *riba* (usury/interest) and the encouragement of risk-sharing are foundational to Islamic commercial ethics. These principles manifest practically in the behavior of traders in Tamidung Village who extend interest-free credit (*hutang*) to customers based on social trust rather than financial collateral—a practice that simultaneously embodies *ta'awun*, *amanah*, and *maslahah*.

Dusuki & Abdullah (2007) further examined the concept of *maslahah* in Islamic banking and finance, arguing that the principle demands businesses actively consider the welfare of all stakeholders — not merely shareholders — in their decision-making. In micro-trading contexts, this is expressed through product curation (refusing to sell expired goods), sensitivity to consumer financial conditions, and participation in communal events such as Ramadan gatherings that reinforce relational bonds beyond purely commercial interactions.

Rice (1999) proposed that Islamic business ethics can be operationalized along two dimensions: ethical behavior in marketplace transactions (transactional ethics) and the broader social and environmental responsibilities of business actors (relational ethics). Traders in Tamidung Village appear to demonstrate strong relational ethics — characterized by community solidarity, care for indebted customers, and avoidance of exploitative practices — even while their transactional documentation practices remain informal and underdeveloped.

Social Capital and Network Theory in Traditional Trading

Social capital theory, as developed by Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1990), offers powerful analytical tools for understanding how traders leverage their social networks for business sustainability. Social capital refers to the resources embedded in social relationships — trust, norms, and networks — that facilitate collective action and economic cooperation. In the context of micro-enterprises, social capital often substitutes for financial capital, providing access to credit, market information, and cooperative labor arrangements.

Aguiar (2002) distinguished between bonding social capital (strong ties within homogeneous groups) and bridging social capital (weaker ties across diverse groups). Traders in rural Islamic communities like Tamidung Village appear to rely predominantly on bonding social capital — rooted in shared religious identity, kinship ties, and neighborhood proximity — to build loyal customer bases and cooperative supplier relationships. This form of social capital, while less diverse, provides deep trust and emotional security that compensates for the absence of formal institutional mechanisms.

Granovetter's (1985) concept of embeddedness is equally relevant here. He argued that economic action is embedded in ongoing social relations and cannot be understood independently of the social context in which it occurs. The trading practices in Tamidung Village — characterized by personalized credit, neighborhood solidarity, and community-based loyalty — exemplify what Granovetter called “thick” social embeddedness, where economic and social relationships are deeply intertwined and mutually constitutive.

Woolcock (1998) further argued that in developing economies, high levels of social capital at the community level (integration) combined with weak formal institutional linkages (linkage) is typical and can sustain economic activity in the short to medium term, but may limit scalability and competitiveness in the long run. This dynamic appears directly applicable to the Tamidung Village context, where social cohesion is high but financial formalization and technological adoption remain low.

Socio-Cultural Dismensions of Entrepreneurship in Rural Islamic Communities

Entrepreneurship research has increasingly recognized the importance of socio-cultural context in shaping entrepreneurial behavior, motivations, and strategies. Weber's (Weber, 1947) classical thesis on the Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism stimulated decades of scholarship on the relationship between religious values and economic behavior. Subsequent scholars, including (Nasrallah, 2015), extended this inquiry to Islamic societies, examining whether and how Islamic religious values shape economic conduct and entrepreneurial culture.

Dana (2010) provided a comprehensive comparative analysis of entrepreneurship across Islamic communities worldwide, identifying several common patterns: a preference for consensus-based decision-making, a strong orientation toward community welfare, risk aversion grounded in the prohibition of *gharar* (excessive uncertainty), and the centrality of family and kinship networks in business organization. These characteristics are clearly visible in the trading practices of Tamidung Village, where business decisions are influenced as much by communal norms and religious consciousness as by market logic.

Kaplan & Haenlein (2010), in their foundational work on social media, noted that digital platforms have transformed how businesses engage with communities and build social capital. However, for traditional micro-traders in rural settings, the transition to digital engagement remains incomplete. Research by (Ascarya et al., 2015) confirms that while small traders are increasingly aware of social media's potential, many lack the digital literacy, infrastructure, and capital to fully leverage these platforms — a limitation that the traders of Tamidung Village appear to share.

The concept of pesantren-based economy — an economic model rooted in the values and networks of Islamic boarding schools — is particularly relevant to communities in Madura, where Tamidung Village is located. Scholars such as Bruinessen (van Bruinessen, 1995) have documented the deep social and economic influence of pesantren institutions in Madurese society, noting that the moral authority of kiai (Islamic scholars) and the communal ethos of santri (Islamic students) permeate economic life at the village level. This religious and social infrastructure provides the normative foundation upon which traders in Tamidung Village build their social and ethical business strategies.

Research Gaps and Theoretical Contribution of the Current Study

The foregoing review reveals three significant research gaps that the current study addresses. First, while existing literature has examined social strategies of micro-traders in Indonesian urban and semi-urban markets (Ascarya et al., 2015), research focusing specifically on rural Madurese trading communities — with their distinctive religious culture and social organization — remains scarce. The Tamidung Village context offers a unique analytical case that enriches the existing literature on Indonesian micro-enterprise.

Second, most studies on Islamic business ethics have focused on formal Islamic financial institutions (banks, insurance companies, and microfinance organizations) rather than on informal micro-traders who apply Islamic principles intuitively and organically through daily practice. This study therefore contributes to a growing body of literature that seeks to understand Islamic business ethics “from below” — as lived practice rather than institutional policy.

Third, the existing literature on social capital and emotional bonding in business sustainability has largely been developed within Western secular frameworks. The current study integrates Islamic ethical principles — particularly ta'awun, amanah, sidq, and maslahah — into the analysis of social and emotional bonding strategies, thereby offering a culturally and religiously grounded extension of these theoretical frameworks. This integration contributes to the decolonization of management and entrepreneurship theory by centering indigenous Islamic values as analytical rather than merely contextual variables.

The conceptual framework of this study, therefore, draws on the intersection of social capital theory, Islamic business ethics, relational marketing theory, and socio-cultural entrepreneurship research to provide a holistic understanding of how traders in Tamidung Village sustain their businesses through socially and spiritually embedded strategies.

This literature review has established the theoretical and empirical foundations for the study of traders' social strategies in Tamidung Village within the framework of Islamic business ethics. The review demonstrates that: (1) social strategies are central to the sustainability of micro-enterprises in developing economies; (2) Islamic business ethics provides a robust normative framework that integrates commercial and moral imperatives; (3) social capital — particularly bonding capital rooted in religious identity and communal solidarity — plays a decisive role in trader sustainability; (4) emotional and relational bonding constitutes a form of competitive advantage for small traders; and (5) the socio-cultural and religious context of rural Madurese communities significantly shapes entrepreneurial practice.

The current study makes an original contribution by situating these theoretical insights within the specific empirical context of Tamidung Village, illuminating how Islamic business ethics are operationalized in the daily practices of micro-traders rather than merely articulated as institutional policy. By doing so, it enriches both the academic literature on Islamic entrepreneurship and provides practical insights for policy-makers and practitioners seeking to strengthen micro-enterprise sustainability in rural Muslim communities.

METHODOLOGY

This research method uses a qualitative approach by collecting data in the field conducted in Tamidung village. This study applied a data triangulation technique through interviews with no more than eight Tamidung villagers who worked as traders. To analyze the data, this journal uses the Spreadly method. The process starts with the domain, continues with taxonomy, compensation, and then performs a theme analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social Strategy of Tamidung Village Traders

The majority of traders such as Mrs. Misnatun (Warung Al-Istiqamah), the owner of Warung Al-Hikmah, to Warung Ana Jaya, stated that they prefer to buy materials and merchandise from local suppliers or their own neighbors. This is a form of social solidarity and an effort to maintain economic turnover within the scope of the village community. This strategy reflects the principle of *ta'awun* (mutual help) in Islamic business ethics, where business continuity is not only oriented to personal profit, but also to social blessings.

In the context of relationships with consumers, almost all informants mentioned that they provide debt with consideration of consumers' social needs and emotional closeness. Although many of them do not have a formal recording system, they still try to maintain a balance so that capital is not eroded too much by receivables. This attitude shows the implementation of the principles of trust and mercy in trading practices: trust and affection are maintained even though the business risks decrease.

Another strategy that stands out is the persistence, tenacity, and friendliness of the merchants in serving consumers. This approach is a selling point in itself, especially in a limited competitive environment. As stated by the owners of Warung Sumber Barokah and Warung Madura Ida Barokah, their success is not due to large capital or sophisticated marketing strategies, but because of friendly, honest, and consistent service. This attitude is in line with the principles of *sidq* (honesty) and *ihsan* (doing good) in Islam.

Some traders such as the owners of Warung Madura Ida Barokah and Warung Sumber Barokah began to separate between business and personal finance as a form of discipline. This is important in maintaining business sustainability. In the perspective of Islamic business ethics, this action shows good faith in maintaining clarity and transparency in *muamalah*.

Most of the informants revealed that they do not provide material rewards to customers, but use religious momentum such as breaking the fast together in the month of Ramadan as a form of togetherness. This is not only a social strategy, but also a spiritual approach to strengthen solidarity with consumers. This practice is in line with the values of *ukhuwah* (brotherhood) and *barakah* (blessings) in Islamic business ethics.

Some traders also showed initiatives to read consumer needs and adjust strategies such as setting operating hours, providing products according to the harvest season, and ensuring the quality of goods such as not selling expired products. Although simple, this action is a form of *maslahah* (creating goodness) in Islamic ethics.

Traders establish close social relationships with the surrounding community, both as customers, suppliers, and business partners. A real example: The purchase of goods from neighbors or local products (crackers, snacks, gasoline, etc.), as done by Mrs. Misnatun and other traders, shows a high social bond and sense of community.

Some traders, such as the owner of Warung Madura Ida Barokah, even refused to take over business opportunities that could belong to their neighbors. This shows the real practice of the principles of *ta'awun* (mutual help) and *ukhuwah* (brotherhood) in Islam. And also the practice of breaking the fast together or sharing in the month of Ramadan also reflects social and religious values that are oriented towards *barakah* and friendship, not just business promotion.

The emotional connection that exists between traders and consumers is a strength in itself, Traders not only treat customers as buyers, but also as neighbors, brothers, and part of the community. This can be seen from their patient attitude towards consumers who are in debt, and rarely aggressively collect debts, as expressed by the owners of Warung Al-Hikmah and Toko Afrin.

The absence of a formal reward system is replaced by social familiarity and friendly service. This is a form of trust-based emotional approach. Traders such as the owners of Warung Alfian Cebong and Warung Ana Jaya do not rely on financial records but use instincts and a sense of moral responsibility, which are actually rooted in the value of amanah (fulfilling responsibility) and sidq (honesty).

From the perspective of Islamic business ethics, the social and emotional approach is part of the morals in muamalah where doing business here is not only to make profits but also to maintain human relationships based on honesty, compassion, and empathy.

Balance between spirituality and pragmatism Traders do not use a capitalist-style competitive strategy, but instead are oriented towards blessings and mutual well-being.

Spiritual awareness: The names of stalls such as Al-Istiqamah, Al-Hikmah, and Sumber Barokah reflect the intention of worship and the hope of blessings. It is a form of emotional approach that is of high spiritual value.

Social Strategy of Tamidung Village Traders in Maintaining Businesses Perceptions of Islamic Business Ethics

The social strategies found in this study prove that the principles of Islamic business ethics are not only conceptual, but have been integrated into the practices of traders in Tamidung Village. They don't just sell products, but they also instill the values of honesty, responsibility, fairness, and solidarity in their daily interactions.

However, challenges remain due to the lack of financial records, high uncollectible receivables, and limited business innovations, which still hinder further development. Therefore, although social and religious values are a strong foundation, it is necessary to provide practical assistance or training so that their businesses can be more competitive without losing the Islamic values that are their identity.

The social and emotional approach in the context of the strategy of the traders of Tamidung Village is very strong and plays a significant role in sustaining their business. Based on the results of your interviews and observations, here is an in-depth analysis of the social and emotional approaches applied by traders, linked to the perspective of Islamic business ethics

Based on the results of interviews with eight entrepreneurs in Tamidung Village, it was revealed that the majority of business actors apply competition tactics that focus on social approaches and emotional bonds with clients. This is reflected in

their efforts to maintain good relationships, friendly attitudes, prompt service, and trust in customers as core values. Many of the respondents also revealed that strategic positions play a role in the continuity of their business, especially for those who are on the main path or close to educational institutions.

The social approach carried out is in the form of Solidarity and Local Networks where traders establish close social relationships with the surrounding community, both as customers, suppliers, and business partners.

Emotional bonding strategies built in the form of Closeness, Trust, and Tolerance The emotional relationship established between traders and consumers is a strength in itself. Traders not only treat customers as buyers, but also as neighbors, brothers, and part of the community. This can be seen from their attitude of being patient with consumers who are in debt, and rarely aggressively collecting debts.

The absence of innovation based on the latest technology or accounting systems shows that the competition strategy in this environment remains very traditional. Even so, the belief in blessings and the principle of income that already exists as a driver of their work motivation and fighting power, in line with the principles of business ethics in Islam which include tawakkal, sincerity, and ta'awun.

Islamic business ethics serve as a guideline that indirectly affects trading activities in Tamidung. This can be seen from the choice of their business names, such as "Al-Istiqamah", "Al-Hikmah", and "Sumber Barokah", which reflect the hope for blessings and integrity in doing business. When providing loans to customers, the majority of business actors still pay attention to the financial situation of consumers and do not apply interest, as an act of mercy (affection).

However, the act of lending money without a record causes many funds to be unable to return, and adds to the pressure on the business's finances. Even so, merchants continue to show patience and avoid harsh billing, for fear of damaging social bonds. This is in line with the principle of kindness in Islam which emphasizes the importance of kindness and empathy in transactions.

The social approach has an important role in maintaining and developing a business. The following is the relationship between the social approach and the sustainability of the first effort of Building good relationships with the local community. This can be done by collaborating with community leaders, local organizations, and social institutions and also participating in social activities such as social services, sponsoring local events, or training MSMEs in the surrounding area. Second, Using Social Media for Social Interaction, the use of social media is not only for promotion, but also to listen to aspirations, answer questions, and respond to consumer feedback and create user-generated content, such as testimonials, challenges, or reviews.

Third, Collaborating with Other Businesses. Collaboration activities with other businesses in the same or different sectors to support each other and cross-promotion.

Example: coffee shop teamed up with a local bookstore to create a co-op event. Fourth, community-based loyalty programs. This can be done by creating referral or community-based loyalty programs such as discounts for repeat customers, or rewards for inviting friends. Fifth, Social Empowerment through Work. Empowering the surrounding community as a workforce or business partner and Using local materials as a form of support for the microeconomy.

An emotional bonding strategy is one of the most effective approaches to maintaining and growing a business in the long run. Emotional bonds create loyalty that goes deeper than just a transactional relationship. Customers or employees feel personally and emotionally connected to the brand or company

Emotional Bonding Strategies to Maintain Business that can be done include first, Building Brand Storytelling, which is telling the origins of the business, struggles, and values held with the aim of touching the hearts of customers to feel “involved” in the business journey. Second, Customer Service is Personal and Empathetic, this needs to be done because customers want to be treated as human beings, not numbers. Third, Build a Customer Community, Create a space or community where customers can feel part of something bigger. Fourth, Consistency of Values and Business Culture, Businesses that have strong social or environmental values will attract customers with the same values. fifth Emotional Marketing, to enhance memorability and emotional connection Use visual content or narrative that touches the heart.

In the face of competition, the methods that are often used are to provide satisfactory service, maintain good product quality, and maintain consumer trust. Some also carry out social activities such as breaking the fast together as a form of sharing sustenance and strengthening the sense of togetherness. This is a reflection of *ukhuwah* and *barakah* in Islamic economic practice.

Few have implemented real innovations such as establishing new branches, expanding product variety, or introducing the latest accounting system. Despite this, the passion to continue to survive and advance is still held firmly by business people, relying on social relationships and trust as their main assets.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that the social strategies of traders in Tamidung Village play a big role in maintaining their businesses. A strong social relationship approach, such as cooperation with local suppliers, tolerance of indebted consumers, and friendly service, is the key to business sustainability.

The strategy is in line with Islamic business ethics principles, such as *ta'awun* (helping), *amanah* (responsibility), and *sidq* (honesty). Although many merchants have not used neat financial records, spiritual value and emotional closeness to consumers are major strengths. Thus, the success of a business is not only determined by capital, but also by Islamic beliefs and values applied in daily business practices.

Author's Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the conceptualization, data collection, analysis, drafting, and critical revision of this manuscript. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript. Fz's special contribution is the strengthening of the ethical analysis of Islamic consumption, while Msa presents the arguments of the Qur'an and Sunnah proportionally according to their respective expertise.

Declaration of Competing Interest

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