

The Meaning and Experience of Muslim UMKM Actors on the Application of Sharia Economic Principles in Micro-Business Management A Phenomenological Study in Indonesia

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Sharia Economic Principles,
UMKM,
Phenomenology,
Islamic Business Ethics,
Micro-Business
Management,
Indonesia

Article history:

Received 2026-02-14

Revised 2026-03-02

Accepted 2026-03-24

ABSTRACT

This study explores the meaning and lived experiences of Muslim micro, small, and medium enterprise (UMKM) actors in applying Sharia economic principles within micro-business management in Indonesia. Using a phenomenological approach, this research seeks to understand how Islamic values such as honesty (*ṣidq*), trustworthiness (*amānah*), justice (*‘adl*), and the prohibition of *riba* are interpreted and practiced in daily business activities. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation involving selected Muslim UMKM actors who actively integrate Sharia principles into their businesses. The findings reveal that the application of Sharia economic principles is not merely normative but becomes a moral and spiritual foundation guiding business decisions, financial management, and customer relations. Participants perceive their businesses not only as profit-oriented entities but also as a form of worship (*‘ibādah*) and social responsibility. However, challenges remain, including limited literacy on Islamic finance, market competition, and inconsistencies in implementation. Despite these obstacles, the commitment to ethical business practices rooted in Islamic teachings strengthens trust, sustainability, and business resilience. This study contributes to the development of Islamic economic discourse by highlighting the experiential dimensions of Sharia implementation at the micro level, offering insights for policymakers, educators, and practitioners in promoting inclusive and value-based economic practices in Indonesia.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, economic development based on Islamic values has experienced a significant increase, both at the global and national levels (Syahrudin,

Susanto, Ummah, Musyafa, & Isa, 2025). Indonesia, as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, has great potential in developing the sharia economy, including in the micro, small and medium enterprise (UMKM) sector (Abidin, 2022; Putu Ayu Sita Laksmi & I Gde Wedana Arjawa, 2023). The principles of Islamic economics such as justice ('adl), honesty (şidq), trustworthiness, and the prohibition of usury, gharar, and maisir are the ethical foundations that are expected to be able to create an economic system that is not only oriented towards profit, but also towards blessings and social welfare (Haidir & Setyari, 2024). In this context, MSMEs have a strategic position because they are the backbone of the national economy, absorbing a large number of workers and contributing significantly to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Junedi & Dwi Arumsari, 2021). In practice, Muslim MSMEs in Indonesia not only act as economic agents but also as individuals with religious awareness in carrying out their business activities. Many entrepreneurs have begun integrating Islamic values into their daily business practices, such as avoiding usury in financing, implementing transparent transactions, and maintaining product quality as a form of moral responsibility to consumers (Muhammad Nooraiman Zailani, Nurul Huda Mohd Satar, & Roza Hazli Zakaria, 2022). Furthermore, the emergence of various sharia-compliant business communities, sharia-compliant cooperatives, and support from sharia-compliant financial institutions is further strengthening the Islamic economic ecosystem at the grassroots level. This phenomenon demonstrates a transformation in economic awareness that is not only rational but also spiritual.

However, in practice, the application of sharia economic principles to MSMEs still faces various challenges. One major issue is the gap between normative understanding and practical implementation. Many MSMEs conceptually understand the importance of sharia principles but are unable to consistently apply them in business management (Darsanto, Effendy, & Nuryanto, 2021; Putri, Anggraini, & Harahap, 2023). Limited Islamic financial literacy, limited access to Islamic financing institutions, and intense market competition often hinder the implementation of these principles. Furthermore, there is the challenge of economic pragmatism, where some business actors prioritize short-term profits over adherence to Islamic values. Another issue is the lack of in-depth research into the subjective experiences of MSMEs in implementing Islamic economic principles (Amalia, Bulutoding, & Sumarlin, 2024; Auda, 2008). Most previous research tends to focus on normative, regulatory, or quantitative aspects, such as literacy levels, financial performance, and economic contribution. However, to comprehensively understand how Sharia principles are truly internalized and implemented in daily business practices, an approach that explores the meaning and lived experiences of business actors is necessary. This is

where the phenomenological approach becomes relevant, as it allows researchers to explore the subjective dimensions, awareness, and interpretations of individuals' experiences of reality.

As a solution to this problem, this study offers a phenomenological approach to explore the meaning and experiences of Muslim MSMEs in implementing Islamic economic principles. This approach is expected to provide a deeper understanding of how Islamic values are not only understood theoretically but also internalized and realized in business practices. Furthermore, the results of this study are expected to form the basis for developing more contextual and applicable policies, educational programs, and mentoring for Islamic MSMEs. Several previous studies have shown that the application of Islamic economic principles has a positive influence on business sustainability and consumer trust. For example, research by Trisnawati et al. emphasizes the importance of Islamic business ethics in creating a just and sustainable economic system (Trisnawati, Wahab, & Habbe, 2021). Meanwhile, research by Abrori and Hadi shows that moral values in Islamic economics can be a solution to the global economic crisis (Abrori & Hadi, 2020). At the national level, research by Mustafa et al. revealed that sharia-based MSMEs have great potential in increasing financial inclusion (Mustafa, Idris, & Dunakhir, 2025). Another study by Indrastuti and Najihah highlighted the importance of Islamic financial literacy in improving the performance of MSMEs (Indriastuti & Najihah, 2020). However, most of this research still focuses on structural aspects and has not explored the subjective experiences of business actors in depth. Therefore, there is a research gap that needs to be filled through a phenomenological approach.

The purpose of this study is to understand and describe the meaning and experiences of Muslim MSMEs in applying Islamic economic principles in micro-enterprise management in Indonesia. Specifically, this study aims to identify how business actors interpret Islamic principles, how they implement them in business practices, and the challenges and strategies they face in this process. The urgency of this research lies in the importance of strengthening a values-based economy in facing increasingly complex global economic dynamics. Amidst the currents of capitalism that tend to emphasize material aspects, Islamic economics offers an alternative system that is more equitable and sustainable. By understanding the real experiences of MSMEs, this research can contribute to formulating a more inclusive Islamic economic development strategy based on the real needs of the community. Furthermore, this research is also relevant in supporting the national agenda for Islamic economic and financial development in Indonesia.

The novelty of this research lies in the use of a phenomenological approach to examine the implementation of Islamic economic principles in MSMEs. Unlike previous studies, which tended to be normative and quantitative, this study emphasizes the subjective dimension of experience and the meanings constructed by business actors. Thus, this research not only provides a theoretical contribution to the development of Islamic economic studies but also offers a new, more humanistic and contextual perspective on understanding Islamic economic practices at the micro level.

2. METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological research type to understand the meaning and lived experiences of Muslim MSMEs in applying Islamic economic principles in micro-business management. The phenomenological approach was chosen because it is able to deeply explore subjective awareness, meaning, and real practices carried out by business actors in the context of everyday life. The research location was conducted in Indonesia with a focus on Muslim MSMEs who actively integrate Islamic economic principles in their business activities. Research subjects were selected using a purposive sampling technique, with the following criteria: (1) MSMEs are Muslim, (2) have been running a business for at least two years, and (3) have a commitment to implementing Islamic values such as honesty, justice, and avoiding usury. The number of informants was determined by snowballing until data saturation was achieved.

Data collection techniques were carried out through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation (Sugiyono, 2015). Interviews were conducted semi-structured to allow informants to freely express their experiences and perspectives. Observations were conducted to directly observe business practices, while documentation was used to supplement data related to business activities. Data analysis employed a phenomenological model with stages of data reduction, horizontalization, grouping meaning units, and compiling textural and structural descriptions to obtain the essence of the informants' experiences (Wahid, 2021). To maintain the validity of the data, this study uses source and method triangulation techniques, as well as conducting member checking with informants.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The research results show that Muslim MSMEs (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises) understand Islamic economic principles as a guideline for running their businesses. The values of honesty, trustworthiness, and justice form the basis of business practices, although their implementation varies. Differences in

understanding, limited literacy, and economic pressures influence the consistent application of Islamic principles in daily business activities.

Table 1. Research Findings

No	Aspects of Findings	Description of Findings	Field Conditions	Supporting Factors	Inhibiting Factors
1	Meaning of Business	Business is understood as worship ('ibādah) and social responsibility.	MSME actors link business with religious values	Spiritual awareness, religious background	Lack of in-depth understanding of sharia concepts
2	The Value of Honesty (ṣidq)	Maintain transparency in transactions and product quality	Product information is provided as is.	Islamic ethics, customer trust	Fierce market competition
3	Trust Value	Maintaining the trust of consumers and business partners	True to promise in delivery and quality	Moral commitment of business actors	Production and distribution pressure
4	The Value of Justice ('adalah)	Does not harm other parties in the transaction	Fair pricing	The principle of justice in Islam	Market price fluctuations
5	Implementation of Islamic Finance	Avoid usury and use the sharia system	Some use sharia financing	Islamic legal awareness	Access to Islamic financial institutions is limited
6	Level of Understanding	Variations in understanding the principles of Islamic economics	There are comprehensive and partial ones	Experience and education	Minimal Islamic financial literacy
7	Consistency of Implementation	Not all actors consistently apply sharia principles	Practice is still flexible according to conditions	Religious intentions	Economic pressures and the cost of living
8	External Challenges	Market competition and economic conditions	Players adjust business strategies	Business network	Competition and market instability
9	Internal Challenges	Limited knowledge and management	Business management is still simple	Business experience	Minimal training and mentoring

Discussion

Spiritual and Ethical Meaning in Muslim MSME Business Practices

The results of this study indicate that Muslim MSMEs view Islamic economic principles not merely as a set of normative rules, but as a spiritual foundation deeply embedded in all their business activities. For these entrepreneurs, economic activity is not merely a means to gain material profit, but also an integral part of devotion to Allah SWT. Business is understood as a form of worship (ibādah) that has both a

vertical dimension (relationship with God) and a horizontal dimension (relationships with fellow human beings). This understanding makes business activities inseparable from the religious values they believe in and practice in their daily lives (Sri wahyuni & Muhammad Wahyuddin Abdullah, 2021). This spiritual awareness is reflected in various concrete practices carried out by MSMEs. They strive to maintain the halal status of their products, both in terms of ingredients, production processes, and distribution. Honesty (*ṣidq*) is a key principle in transactions, where business actors strive to convey product information truthfully without manipulation or misdirection. Furthermore, the value of trustworthiness is also demonstrated through a commitment to fulfilling promises to customers, such as timely delivery and product quality that matches the offered price. Furthermore, there is an orientation to providing benefits to others, both in the form of good service to consumers and social contributions to the surrounding environment (Amalia et al., 2024).

This spiritual dimension is a significant differentiator between Sharia-based business practices and conventional business practices. While the conventional system tends to be primarily focused on maximizing profits (profit-oriented), from a Sharia perspective, profit remains important, but must be achieved through halal and ethical means, accompanied by the hope of blessings (*barakah*). Blessings here are not only interpreted as quantitative increases in profits, but also encompass inner peace, business sustainability, and harmonious relationships with customers and business partners (Lubis & Farid, 2024). Thus, business success is measured not only by financial aspects, but also by the accompanying moral and spiritual values. This finding aligns with the concept of Islamic business ethics, which places moral values at the core of economic activity. From this perspective, economic activity is not value-free, but rather imbued with ethical values derived from Islamic teachings. Principles such as justice (*'adl*), honesty, responsibility, and social concern form the foundation of every business decision. Therefore, business practices are judged not only by the final results achieved, but also by the processes undertaken to achieve those results. Processes that do not comply with Sharia principles, even if they generate significant profits, are still considered suboptimal within the framework of Islamic business ethics.

This awareness of the importance of spiritual and ethical values encourages MSMEs to be more careful in running their businesses. They tend to consider halal-haram (permissible) aspects, justice, and the social impact of every decision they make. For example, when setting prices, business owners not only consider profit but also consider consumer capabilities and market conditions to avoid injustice.

Similarly, in establishing cooperation with other parties, the principles of mutual benefit and honesty are top priorities. Thus, it can be concluded that the spiritual and ethical meanings in Muslim MSME business practices are not merely conceptual but are truly internalized and realized in concrete actions. These values serve not only as normative guidelines but also as a source of motivation and self-control for business owners in facing various business challenges. This demonstrates that Islamic economics at the micro level has a highly humanistic and transcendental dimension, capable of integrating worldly and hereafter interests in a balanced manner.

Implementation of Sharia Principles in Business Management

In terms of implementation, research results indicate that Muslim MSMEs have strived to actualize Islamic economic principles in various dimensions of business management, albeit at varying levels of depth. This implementation is not only evident in normative aspects but also begins to touch on technical practices in daily business operations. One of the most prominent forms of implementation is the effort to avoid usury practices in business financing. Some MSMEs choose to use personal capital, interest-free loans from family, or utilize Islamic financial institutions that offer profit-sharing financing schemes, such as *mudharabah* and *musyarakah*. These choices demonstrate an awareness of maintaining the alignment of economic practices with Islamic principles, although in some cases this remains limited (Susanto, Isa, & Syahrudin, 2025).

Furthermore, the implementation of sharia principles is also evident in business financial management. MSMEs strive to maintain transparency in financial records, albeit in a simple manner. This transparency reflects the values of honesty (*ṣidq*) and responsibility (*amanah*), which are the foundation for building trust with both business partners and customers. In some cases, business owners have also begun to separate personal and business finances as a form of professionalism and an effort to maintain accountability (Komariyah & Alan, 2024). In marketing and customer relations, Sharia principles are realized through honest and non-manipulative business practices. MSMEs tend to provide product information truthfully, without exaggerating quality or concealing deficiencies. This demonstrates a commitment to Islamic business ethics, which emphasize honesty and fairness in transactions. Customer relationships are built on trust, where customer satisfaction is seen not only as a business strategy but also as a moral responsibility.

However, this study also found that the implementation of Islamic economic principles in business management is not yet fully optimal and still faces various obstacles. One major obstacle is limited access to Islamic financial institutions,

especially for MSMEs in certain regions. This limitation causes some business actors to still rely on conventional, interest-based financing systems, even though they are fundamentally aware of their inconsistency with Islamic values. This situation indicates a gap between the ideal and the reality of Islamic economic practices at the micro level. Furthermore, limited literacy and understanding of Islamic contracts are also significant inhibiting factors. Many MSMEs do not yet fully understand concepts such as murabahah, ijarah, mudharabah, and musyarakah, resulting in their application in business practices remaining partial and unsystematic. The lack of training, outreach, and mentoring from relevant parties further exacerbates this situation. As a result, Islamic principles are more often applied to general ethical aspects, such as honesty and trustworthiness, while the technical aspects of Islamic finance have not been fully integrated.

These findings indicate that the implementation of Islamic economic principles in MSMEs is still in a transitional phase, moving from normative awareness to more comprehensive practice. Therefore, more structured efforts in the form of education, training, and ongoing mentoring are needed to increase the capacity of MSMEs. Support from the government, Islamic financial institutions, and educational institutions is crucial in building a conducive ecosystem for the development of Sharia-based businesses. Thus, the implementation of Islamic principles will not remain merely a discourse but can be realized concretely and sustainably in MSME business practices.

Challenges and Adaptation Strategies in the Implementation of Islamic Economics

The results of this study indicate that Muslim MSMEs face various complex challenges in implementing Islamic economic principles in managing their businesses. These challenges are multidimensional, encompassing both internal aspects originating from within the business actors themselves and external aspects related to the broader business environment and economic system. Internally, limited understanding of Islamic economic concepts is a major obstacle. Many MSMEs possess religious awareness, but this is not matched by adequate knowledge regarding the technical implementation of Islamic principles, particularly in terms of contracts, financial management, and financing systems. Furthermore, the still-traditional and simplistic nature of business management also hinders the systematic integration of Islamic principles.

Urgent economic needs further complicate the situation. In certain situations, MSMEs are faced with pragmatic choices that require them to prioritize business continuity over the ideals of implementing Sharia principles. For example, when

access to Sharia financing is limited, some businesses are forced to use conventional financial services to maintain cash flow. This demonstrates the dilemma between religious commitment and the economic realities they face daily (Firdausi, 2020). On the other hand, external challenges are no less significant. Increasingly fierce market competition demands that MSMEs be adaptive and innovative, which sometimes forces them to adjust their business strategies to market conditions that do not always align with Sharia principles. The lack of policy support specifically targeting the strengthening of Sharia-compliant MSMEs also poses a structural obstacle. Furthermore, limited access to the Sharia economic ecosystem, such as Sharia financial institutions, training, and supportive business networks, further restricts MSMEs' room to develop their businesses in accordance with Islamic principles (Debbi, 2018).

Despite facing these challenges, this study found that MSMEs have demonstrated a strong ability to adapt to the current dynamics. One of the main strategies developed is strengthening religious intentions as a foundation for running a business. This strong intention serves as a source of motivation and moral resilience, encouraging entrepreneurs to remain consistent with Sharia values, despite limitations. Furthermore, MSMEs have begun to build and utilize Sharia business community networks as a means of sharing information, experiences, and support. These communities play a crucial role in broadening horizons and opening access to business opportunities that are more in line with Sharia principles. Another adaptation strategy is independent learning through various sources, both formal and informal. MSMEs utilize digital media, training, and Islamic studies to enhance their understanding of Sharia economics. This learning process demonstrates a conscious effort to continuously develop and improve business practices to better align with Islamic values (Susanto, 2026). Thus, the application of Islamic economic principles is not static or rigid, but rather dynamic and contextual, following the development of the situation faced by business actors.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that the implementation of Islamic economics at the MSME level is a continuous process, involving the interaction of values, knowledge, and socio-economic realities. Flexibility in adapting without abandoning fundamental principles is key for MSMEs in maintaining a balance between the ideals of Islamic law and the practical demands of the business world. This also confirms that strengthening the Islamic economy requires not only individual commitment but also systemic support capable of creating a more inclusive and sustainable ecosystem.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the application of sharia economic principles by Muslim MSMEs in Indonesia is not merely interpreted as a set of normative rules, but has become a life value internalized in daily business activities. Business actors view economic activities as part of worship (ibādah) containing spiritual and social dimensions, thus encouraging them to prioritize the values of honesty (ṣidq), trustworthiness, and justice (‘adl) in every transaction. The implementation of sharia principles has been seen in various aspects, such as the avoidance of usury (riba), financial transparency, and business relationships based on trust. However, the level of implementation still varies, ranging from comprehensive to partial, depending on the level of understanding, access, and circumstances of each business actor. On the other hand, MSMEs face various challenges, both internal and external, such as limited sharia economic literacy, simple business management, economic pressures, and limited access to sharia institutions and ecosystems. Nevertheless, they demonstrate good adaptability through strengthening religious intentions, establishing community networks, and self-learning efforts. Thus, the implementation of Islamic economics in MSMEs is a dynamic and ongoing process that requires systemic support from various parties. This research confirms that the integration of spiritual values and business practices can be a crucial foundation for creating businesses that are not only profit-oriented, but also blessed and sustainable.

Further researchers are advised to examine the implementation of sharia economics in MSMEs using a quantitative or mixed methods approach and expand the research locations to obtain a more comprehensive and generalizable picture of sharia economic practices in various regions in Indonesia.

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