

Culture of Healthy Business Competition from the Perspective of Islamic Business Ethics in the Grocery Trading Community in Nabire

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ABSTRACT

Business competition is an inevitability in the business world, including in the basic necessities (sembako) trade sector. This study aims to analyze the culture of business competition among the basic necessities merchant community in Nabire and examine it from the perspective of Islamic Business Ethics. This research employs a descriptive qualitative method using a field research approach. Data collection was conducted through observation, in-depth interviews with merchants in the main markets of Nabire, and documentation. The results indicate that, in general, the basic necessities merchant community in Nabire has implemented a healthy culture of business competition. Their business practices tend to avoid destructive price wars, abstain from hoarding goods (ihtikar), and refrain from measurement fraud (tadlis). From the perspective of Islamic Business Ethics, this competitive culture aligns with the principles of honesty (siddiq), justice ('adl), and mutual cooperation (ta'awun). The strong values of brotherhood among the merchants in Nabire also serve as a determining factor in creating an ethical business climate. In conclusion, the business competition among basic necessities merchants in Nabire is not solely oriented toward maximizing financial profit, but also prioritizes social harmony and the pursuit of divine blessings (barakah) in accordance with Islamic law

INTRODUCTION

Trade or business activities constitute the backbone of a region's economy. In the continuously evolving dynamics of the market, business competition becomes an inevitability that cannot be avoided. Economically, healthy competition can encourage efficiency, innovation, and improvements in service quality for consumers. However, when competition shifts toward unhealthy practices and becomes solely oriented toward profit maximization, it often triggers manipulative practices that harm the wider community.

From the perspective of Islamic economics, commercial activities are not only viewed as efforts to fulfill material needs but also possess a dimension of worship that is bound by moral and normative principles. Islamic Business Ethics provides clear boundaries between permissible and prohibited practices. The concept of competition in Islam is essentially encouraged in the form of *fastabiqul khairat* (competing in goodness). This means that competition is acceptable as long as it adheres to the principles of honesty (*siddiq*), justice (*'adl*), and trustworthiness (*amanah*), while avoiding practices such as deception (*gharar*), monopoly/hoarding (*ihtikar*), and fraud in measurement or quality (*tadlis*).

The trade sector of basic necessities (*sembako*) represents one of the main pillars affecting the livelihood of many people. Due to the inelastic nature of its demand – where people continue to purchase regardless of price fluctuations – this sector is highly vulnerable to unethical competitive practices, particularly when supply is disrupted or during major holidays. Therefore, the implementation of business ethics is crucial among basic goods traders to maintain price stability and the availability of goods in the market.

Nabire Regency, which now holds a strategic role as one of the centers of economic circulation and trade governance in Central Papua Province, has a dynamic market characteristic. The community of basic goods traders in Nabire's main markets consists of individuals from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds who interact daily. Within this local trading landscape, the culture formed among traders significantly determines the economic climate of the region. An interesting phenomenon can be observed where strong social ties and a sense of brotherhood within Nabire society potentially act as a natural barrier against destructive business competition.

Based on this reality, it is important to examine more deeply how the culture of business competition is formed among basic goods traders in Nabire and the extent to which these practices reflect religious moral values. Research on this topic has rarely been conducted specifically in the Central Papua region; therefore, the findings of this study are expected to contribute to the literature on regional economic empowerment strategies based on local wisdom and adherence to Islamic principles.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze in depth the culture of healthy business competition among the community of basic goods traders in Nabire and to examine it comprehensively from the perspective of Islamic Business Ethics.

RESEARCH METHOD

Type and Research Approach

This study on the culture of healthy business competition from the perspective of Islamic business ethics among the community of basic goods traders in Nabire employs a field research design with a descriptive qualitative approach. The selection of a qualitative research type is based on ontological and epistemological considerations that social reality—in this case, the culture of competition and ethical values—is not merely rigid numbers or statistics but a dynamic, intersubjective phenomenon rich in meaning constructed by the actors involved. Qualitative research enables researchers to explore deeply and holistically how values, beliefs, and religious practices are implemented in everyday economic activities.

The approach specifically intersects with a phenomenological perspective, where the researcher seeks to understand the meaning of events and interactions directly experienced by the community of basic goods traders. Through this approach, the main focus is directed toward a detailed and narrative description of traders' economic actions, their strategies for maintaining market share, social interactions among competitors, and how they interpret the concepts of *siddiq* (honesty), *'adl* (justice), and *ta'awun* (mutual assistance) in real buying and selling transactions. Thus, this descriptive qualitative approach does not aim to test hypotheses but rather to explore, discover, and construct meanings behind the phenomenon of healthy business competition within a heterogeneous market environment.

Researcher's Presence

In the tradition of qualitative research, the primary instrument in data collection is the researcher himself/herself (**human instrument**). The presence of the researcher in the field is essential and cannot be fully replaced by other measurement tools such as questionnaires. In the context of research conducted in the markets of Nabire, the researcher acts as a **participant observer** with a moderate level of involvement. This means the researcher interacts directly with basic goods traders, listens to their conversations, observes bargaining dynamics, and directly witnesses how goods are distributed and priced, without interfering in their business decision-making processes.

The researcher's presence in the field is also designed to be adaptive and flexible. The researcher must build strong **rapport** (mutual trust) with the informants. Considering that markets are busy public spaces, a humane sociological approach that does not disrupt peak trading hours becomes crucial so that the researcher's presence is well accepted. The researcher positions themselves as a learner who seeks to understand more deeply the local wisdom and business practices of the community, allowing traders to share their experiences and views openly, naturally, and without feeling judged or monitored by any authority.

Research Location

This research was conducted in Nabire Regency, which administratively now serves as the capital of Central Papua Province. The selection of this location is based on several strong academic justifications and sociological considerations.

First, Nabire holds a geostrategic position as a gateway and economic transit center for regencies in the central highlands of Papua. The high flow of goods – particularly basic necessities (*sembako*) – makes the market dynamics in Nabire highly active, competitive, and characterized by rapid capital circulation.

Second, the main markets in Nabire function as a melting pot, where various ethnic groups, cultures, and religious backgrounds meet, including both indigenous residents and migrant traders from different regions of Indonesia. This heterogeneity creates complex and unique business interactions. The selection of this location is therefore highly relevant to examine how the universal values of Islamic business ethics are adapted, interpreted, and practiced as a moral consensus that transcends cultural differences in maintaining a healthy competitive climate and preventing monopolistic practices or destructive price wars that could disrupt the socio-economic order of the region.

Sources of Research Data

To obtain comprehensive, valid, and credible data, this study classifies data sources into two main categories: primary data sources and secondary data sources.

Primary data represent authoritative data obtained directly from the first sources at the research site. In this study, primary data are derived from the words and actions of key informants. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, combined with snowball sampling. The criteria for selecting informants include:

1. Basic goods traders who have been operating in Nabire for at least **five years**, thus considered to understand market fluctuations and the characteristics of local consumers.
2. Community leaders or heads of market trader associations who possess **informal authority** in resolving business disputes.
3. Consumers or loyal buyers who can provide **objective assessments** regarding traders' services and honesty.

These primary data include interview transcripts regarding the understanding of Islamic ethics, pricing practices, stock management during crises, and direct observations of buying and selling interactions.

Secondary data serve as supporting and complementary data that provide contextual and theoretical frameworks for the primary data. Secondary data in this research are obtained through literature reviews and document analysis. These sources include major reference books on Fiqh Muamalah and Islamic Business Ethics, previous academic journals related to traditional trader behavior, regional government regulations concerning trade governance, and administrative records from relevant agencies regarding market profiles, the number of traders, and fluctuations in basic commodity prices in Nabire. The integration of these two data sources enriches the analytical perspective of the study.

3. Data Collection Techniques

In accordance with the characteristics of qualitative research, data collection procedures are conducted in a natural setting. The data collection techniques applied simultaneously and integratively include observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation.

a. Participant Observation

Observation is conducted to record phenomena that are not verbally expressed by informants. The researcher observes the daily activities of basic goods traders in depth. The systematically observed aspects include: how traders arrange and measure goods using scales, the process of price negotiation with buyers, their interactions with competing traders in adjacent stalls (for instance when there is a shortage of change or borrowing stock from one another), and their responses to distributor price fluctuations. This observation is essential to verify whether traders' normative statements about honesty and fair competition are truly manifested in practical actions in the field.

b. In-depth Interviews

The interviews conducted in this study are **semi-structured interviews**. The researcher prepares an interview guideline containing key questions while maintaining flexibility to explore informants' responses further according to the flow of conversation. The interviews are conducted in a **dialogic, relaxed, and informal manner**, often during traders' break times. The interview topics focus on traders' understanding of the boundaries of competition permitted under Islamic law, their views on the practice of *ihtikar* (hoarding), ethical marketing strategies, and the spiritual motivations behind their business activities. Each interview is carefully documented and recorded using an **audio recorder** with the informant's consent and later transcribed into written text.

c. Documentation

Document analysis is conducted to complement the data obtained from interviews and observations. This technique focuses on collecting written and visual records relevant to the research focus. The collected documents include photographs of market activities, the geographical layout of traders' stalls indicating competitive zoning, reference price lists, market profiles in Nabire, and other supporting literature. Documentation serves as **empirical evidence** that the researcher has directly engaged in fieldwork and conducted academic interactions with the research subjects.

4. Data Validity Checking Techniques

In qualitative research, validity and reliability are translated into the concept of trustworthiness. To ensure that the research findings possess a high level of credibility, accuracy, and scientific accountability, several strategies for validating data are applied.

The primary strategy used is triangulation. First, source triangulation, which tests the credibility of data by comparing information obtained from different sources. For example, a trader's claim that they always weigh goods honestly will be cross-checked with statements from buyers and direct observations from neighboring stalls. Second, technique triangulation, which tests the consistency of data by examining the same source using different techniques. Data obtained from interviews will be compared with data from participant observations and field documentation.

In addition to triangulation, the researcher also conducts prolonged observation to integrate with the market culture and filter potential information bias that may appear during initial encounters. Another step is member checking,

which involves reconfirming draft reports or preliminary conclusions with the main informants. This process ensures that the researcher's interpretations genuinely represent the intentions, perspectives, and experiences of the basic goods trading community rather than merely reflecting the researcher's theoretical assumptions.

5. Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis in qualitative research is not a separate stage conducted after data collection is completed; rather, it is an interactive and ongoing process that begins when the researcher enters the field and continues until the final report is completed. This study employs the interactive data analysis model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The analytical process consists of three simultaneous activities:

a. Data Condensation

Primary and secondary data collected in the field—such as interview transcripts, field notes (observations), and documents—are often extensive and complex. Data condensation refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the raw data. The researcher performs coding to identify which data are relevant to the research focus on healthy competition culture and Islamic business ethics. Informants' statements that are unrelated to the theme are excluded, while relevant data are categorized into derivative themes such as “pricing practices,” “solidarity among traders,” and “rejection of hoarding practices.”

b. Data Display

After condensation, the data are presented in a form that facilitates comprehensive understanding. Since quantitative tables are not used in this format, data presentation is carried out in the form of **descriptive narrative texts**, crucial **direct quotations** from informants, conceptual relationship diagrams, or conceptual matrices. This narrative presentation is structured to connect pieces of information into a **coherent, logical, and flowing academic narrative**, enabling readers to grasp the essence of the competition culture among basic goods traders in Nabire.

c. Conclusion Drawing and Verification

The final step is drawing conclusions. At the initial stage, the researcher formulates tentative conclusions based on emerging patterns, explanations, and causal relationships identified in the displayed data. These conclusions are continuously verified heuristically during the research process by reviewing field notes or conducting peer debriefing discussions. At the final stage, when the data reach saturation—meaning no new substantial information emerges—the researcher formulates a solid final conclusion. This conclusion represents the crystallization of the entire research process, addressing the research problem holistically and confirming that the competitive climate among basic goods traders in Nabire aligns with the manifestation of Islamic business ethics principles.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Overview and Competitive Reality of the Basic Goods Traders Community in Nabire

Nabire Regency holds a geostrategic position as the backbone of the economy and the main distribution center in Central Papua Province. Market dynamics in this region, as observed in traditional markets and other commercial areas, indicate a massive circulation of goods, particularly basic commodities (*sembako*). The community of basic goods traders in Nabire represents a multicultural society, consisting of both local residents and migrants from various regions across Indonesia. This heterogeneity naturally forms a unique market ecosystem in which economic motives interact with social, cultural, and religious values.

Based on field findings, the reality of competition among basic goods traders shows a monopolistic yet relatively controlled competitive pattern. There are dozens to hundreds of traders selling homogeneous commodities (rice, sugar, cooking oil, flour, etc.) within close proximity. According to classical economic theory, such conditions—where many sellers offer identical goods—are highly susceptible to aggressive price wars to capture market share. However, the phenomenon observed in Nabire indicates the opposite. Traders appear to operate under an “unwritten consensus” that prioritizes market stability.

Competition is primarily focused on service quality (service excellence), product variety, and flexibility in building communication with customers rather than engaging in destructive price-cutting practices. Social solidarity among traders is relatively strong and is often facilitated by community associations, shared regional origins, or shared religious beliefs. These social ties function as an informal control mechanism that effectively prevents opportunistic actions that could harm other business entities within the same market area, including surrounding areas such as West Nabire and nearby regions.

2. Analysis of Business Competition Culture Based on Islamic Business Ethics Principles

The practice of basic goods trading in Nabire does not occur in a value-neutral space. The majority of Muslim traders in the region use their religious understanding as a moral foundation in conducting business. The culture of business competition can be classified according to several key principles of Islamic Business Ethics, namely:

a. Manifestation of the Principles of Honesty (*Siddiq*) and Transparency (*Tabligh*)

In Islamic business ethics, *siddiq* (honesty) serves as the fundamental foundation of all forms of economic transactions (*muamalah*). The research findings indicate that the community of basic goods traders in Nabire generally upholds this principle, particularly in terms of measurement and weighing. There is no evidence of systematic manipulation of measuring instruments intended to deceive consumers (*muthaffifin*). The theological awareness that dishonest practices will lead to a loss of blessings (**barakah**) in livelihood serves as an internal moral safeguard for traders.

Furthermore, the principle of *tabligh* is manifested through transparency regarding the condition of traded goods. For instance, when rice commodities show slight quality deterioration (such as broken grains or minor infestation), traders openly inform prospective buyers and adjust the price proportionally. Such openness is not perceived as a weakness that diminishes competitiveness but rather as a strategy to build long-term trust with consumers. From the perspective of modern marketing management, this approach is equivalent to maintaining customer loyalty through personal brand integrity.

b. Enforcement of the Principle of Justice (*'Adl*) in Pricing

Justice in business implies placing everything in its proper proportion, avoiding harm both to oneself and to others (*la dharara wa la dhirar*). In the context of pricing, basic goods traders in Nabire generally follow the market equilibrium price determined by the natural mechanism of supply and demand. They take reasonable profit margins and reject the practice of predatory pricing (selling at a loss to eliminate competitors).

Although Nabire's geographical location makes the distribution of goods heavily dependent on maritime shipping schedules – often vulnerable to weather and logistical disruptions – traders collectively strive to prevent uncontrolled price fluctuations. This commitment to fairness is also reflected in their refusal to exploit consumer information asymmetry regarding actual market prices.

c. Implementation of the Principle of Mutual Assistance (*Ta'awun*) among Competitors

One of the most striking findings in the competitive culture of basic goods traders in Nabire is the strong spirit of *ta'awun* (mutual assistance in goodness). Unlike the secular capitalist paradigm that views competitors as threats to be eliminated, traders in Nabire often perceive competitors as partners in sustaining the economic cycle.

This spirit of *ta'awun* is reflected in the practice of covering stock shortages among neighboring stalls. For example, if a customer seeks a particular item at trader A's stall but the stock is unavailable, trader A may obtain the item from trader B (a competitor) at cost price and sell it to the customer without imposing excessive additional charges. This practice demonstrates a high level of competitive maturity. In addition to preventing the loss of customers, such behavior ensures the smooth circulation of goods in the market and strengthens Islamic brotherhood (*ukhuwah islamiyah*) among local economic actors.

3. Prevention of Prohibited Business Practices (*Bathil*)

The resilience of a healthy competition culture in Nabire is also demonstrated by the community's resistance to various prohibited practices in Islamic commercial jurisprudence (*fiqh muamalah*). Several crucial practices are consistently avoided by traders:

a. Absence of *Ihtikar* (Hoarding of Goods)

Central Papua faces logistical vulnerabilities where delays in basic goods supply – due to external factors – may trigger sudden scarcity. Such conditions theoretically open opportunities for *ihtikar*, the practice of hoarding goods during scarcity to sell them later at extremely high prices. However, field observations confirm that the majority of traders reject this practice. They recognize that *ihtikar* is prohibited because it directly harms the public interest.

Goods circulation continues normally even when warehouse stock begins to decline, often accompanied by self-imposed purchase limitations to ensure more equitable distribution among the community.

b. Avoidance of *Tadlis* (Fraud) and *Najsh* (Artificial Demand Manipulation)

The close familiarity between traders and customers in Nabire's markets minimizes opportunities for *tadlis* (concealing product defects) and *najsh* (artificial bidding or false demand to inflate prices). Economic interactions occur organically and are based on good faith. Traders believe that transactions containing deceptive elements—although potentially profitable in the short term—will spiritually eliminate the *barakah* from their earnings.

4. Implications of Healthy Competition Culture for Local Economic Resilience

The discussion of healthy competition among basic goods traders in Nabire cannot be separated from its implications for regional economic governance. Islamic business ethics internalized by traders has proven not only to function as a vertical moral guide (toward God) but also as horizontal social capital that strengthens the local economy.

First, an ethical business climate contributes to regional macroeconomic stability. The absence of price manipulation and commodity hoarding enables authorities to more effectively mitigate inflation caused by supply shocks. This is particularly important for developing regions like Nabire that require a stable investment and trade climate.

Second, it supports equitable welfare distribution (distributive justice). Healthy competition characterized by *ta'awun* and rejection of monopolistic practices ensures that monetary circulation does not concentrate solely among a few large capital owners but is distributed more evenly across networks of small and medium-scale traders. Such cooperative competition effectively serves as a mechanism for grassroots economic empowerment.

Third, it fosters the paradigm of "Blessing-Based Business." The findings suggest that the economic rationality of basic goods traders in Nabire has evolved beyond the classical concept of *homo economicus*, which focuses solely on material utility. Instead, a shift toward *homo islamicus* is evident, where business success is measured not only by capital accumulation but also by the ability to generate social benefit, maintain communal harmony, and attain divine approval.

Overall, the findings of this research confirm that Islamic business ethics is highly applicable and relevant in addressing the challenges of modern trade. The community of basic goods traders in Nabire demonstrates that integrating economic management strategies with adherence to Islamic principles is not only possible but also creates a resilient, sustainable, and equitable business ecosystem.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results and in-depth analysis of the culture of business competition among the community of basic goods traders in Nabire, several key conclusions can be drawn:

1. **Healthy and Collaborative Competition Culture**

The competition culture within the Nabire basic goods trading community does not reflect extreme capitalist models characterized by destructive competition. Instead, the market demonstrates a pattern of healthy, controlled, and collaborative competition. Traders prioritize service differentiation, strong interpersonal relationships with customers, and product variety rather than engaging in destructive price wars. Social solidarity among traders functions as an effective informal safety valve that reduces the potential for conflict and unethical competition.

2. **Internalization of Islamic Business Ethics in Economic Practice**

The competition practices among basic goods traders in Nabire empirically reflect the implementation of Islamic business ethics values. The principle of *siddiq* (honesty) appears in accurate measurements and transparency regarding product quality. The principle of *'adl* (justice) is manifested through reasonable profit margins without exploiting consumer information asymmetry. Meanwhile, *ta'awun* (mutual assistance) is strongly reflected in the practice of covering stock shortages among competing stalls at cost price.

3. **Resistance to Manipulative and Monopolistic Practices**

The trader community demonstrates strong resistance to prohibited economic practices despite geographical and logistical conditions that might enable such behavior. Practices such as *ihtikar* (hoarding), *tadlis* (fraud), and artificial price manipulation are consistently avoided due to the belief that economic blessings cannot be achieved through actions that harm the public interest.

4. **Implications for Local Economic Empowerment and Resilience**

This ethically grounded competition culture contributes to price stability and smooth distribution of essential goods in Nabire. The cooperative competition model prevents capital concentration among a few market elites and promotes more equitable income distribution at the grassroots level. This confirms that Islamic business ethics is not merely a normative doctrine but a strategic instrument for inclusive and sustainable regional economic development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Academic and Theoretical Recommendations**

• **Development of Sharia Management Literature:**

This research is expected to enrich the academic discourse in economic management studies, particularly concerning the integration of traditional market local wisdom with Islamic trade principles. Future research is recommended to expand the scope beyond the basic goods sector to other strategic commodities such as agriculture or fisheries.

- **Further Quantitative Studies:**

Future research could employ **quantitative methodologies** to measure the correlation between the level of understanding of Islamic business ethics and indicators such as profitability ratios and customer loyalty.

- **2. Practical Recommendations for the Basic Goods Trader Community**

- **Institutionalizing Ethical Values:**

Trader communities should formalize the existing “unwritten ethical consensus” into structured guidelines to facilitate value transmission to new traders and migrants.

- **Digital Adaptation without Losing Moral Values:**

Traders are encouraged to adopt simple digital financial recording and supply chain management systems to anticipate stock shortages caused by shipping delays while maintaining transparency and honesty principles.

- **3. Policy Recommendations for Local Government**

(Nabire Regency Government / Central Papua Provincial Government)

- **Local Wisdom-Based Trade Policy Synergy:**

The government should formulate trade regulations that protect the collaborative culture of traditional markets, positioning itself as a logistics facilitator rather than disrupting existing market equilibrium.

- **Sustainable Economic Empowerment Programs:**

Authorities are encouraged to provide accessible and fair financing schemes, such as Islamic microfinance, and organize retail management training incorporating business ethics and customer service principles.

- **Strengthening Logistics Infrastructure:**

The government should prioritize integrated warehouse infrastructure and ensure the smooth connectivity of sea and land transportation routes connecting Nabire with its distribution areas to maintain stable commodity supply and fair pricing for the community.

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