
Ethical Entrepreneurship among Muslim Gen-Z in Indonesia: Islamic Financial Literacy, Self-Efficacy, and Ethical Habitus among Muslim Gen-Z Entrepreneurs in Palopo

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Article Info

Article history:

Received: January 2025

Revised I: March 2025

Revised II: June 2025

Accepted: October 2025

Keywords:

Islamic Business Ethics, Islamic Financial Literacy, Islamic Values in Entrepreneurship, Phenomenological Study, Self Efficacy.

ABSTRACT

This study explores the entrepreneurial experiences of Muslim Generation Z entrepreneurs in Palopo City, Indonesia, with particular attention to how Islamic financial literacy, self-efficacy, and Islamic business ethics are understood and practiced within digitally mediated business environments. Grounded in the socio-religious and cultural context of Indonesian Islam, the research adopts a qualitative phenomenological approach to examine how young Muslim entrepreneurs construct meaning, internalize moral values, and sustain their businesses in everyday economic practices. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with fifteen purposively selected participants and analysed using Colaizzi's phenomenological method. The findings reveal four interrelated themes. First, Islamic financial literacy is experienced as practical-moral awareness, reflected in transparent pricing, separation of personal and business finances, and avoidance of ambiguous transactions. Second, self-efficacy emerges as psychological-spiritual capital shaped by mastery experiences, social support, and Islamic concepts such as *ikhtiyār* (effort) and *tawakkal* (trust in God). Third, Islamic business ethics operate as an internalized moral habitus reinforced by *Bugis-Luwu* cultural values, including *lempu'*, *siri'*, and *amānah*. Fourth, business sustainability is achieved through the integration of Islamic identity, local culture, and digital practices, forming a distinctive model of ethical digital entrepreneurship. Conceptually, this study contributes a phenomenological perspective that highlights the ethical, cultural, and spiritual dimensions of Muslim Gen-Z entrepreneurship, while offering practical implications for context-sensitive entrepreneurship development programs in Indonesia.

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How to cite: Karina, M., Abdullah, M.R., Ishak., Chen, M. (2025). Ethical Entrepreneurship among Muslim Gen-Z in Indonesia: Islamic Financial Literacy, Self-Efficacy, and Ethical Habitus among Muslim Gen-Z Entrepreneurs in Palopo. *JURNAL INDO-ISLAMIKA*, 15(2), 418–432. <https://doi.org/10.15408/jii.v15i2.48717>



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INTRODUCTION

The swift advancement of digital technology, encompassing e-commerce platforms, social media, and mobile applications, has created significant potential for youth especially Generation Z to participate in entrepreneurial endeavors (Oluka, 2025). In Indonesia, *usaha mikro, kecil, dan menengah* (UMKM/MSMEs) have long been the backbone of the national economy, especially during times of economic crisis, because they can adapt and take on more workers (Raman et al., 2025). Even though this structure is important, most people in Indonesia still want to work in a formal job, which means that not many people are starting their own businesses (Ridha et al., 2023). Recent data show that even though there were 56.56 million entrepreneurs in Indonesia in early 2024, only 3.35% of the total workforce was entrepreneurs. This is far lower than in nearby nations (Databoks, 2024). At the same time, MSMEs still must deal with problems like low financial literacy and not being able to get finance, even though they are still important for creating jobs and keeping the economy stable (Budisusetyo, 2025; Doghan et al., 2025; Mujahidin et al., 2022).

The growth of digital entrepreneurship, which is frequently thought to make economic opportunities more equal, has instead shown a big difference in skills or digital divide between Gen-Z entrepreneurs in big cities and those in smaller or secondary cities (Patrisia et al., 2023). National reports frequently indicate that Gen-Z people in secondary cities, like as Palopo, demonstrate inferior levels of financial and digital literacy relative to their peers in urban areas like Makassar, Bandung, or Jakarta. This difference directly impacts their capacity to manage cash flow, analyze social media metrics, prevent digital fraud, and successfully leverage e-commerce functionalities. As a result, digital entrepreneurship though it appears accessible still hides structural and cognitive barriers that come from unequal access to knowledge and technological abilities. These barriers are still not well understood in the academic literature that already exists.

Furthermore, most research on Gen-Z digital entrepreneurship in Indonesia mostly focuses on algorithmic mechanisms, digital marketing tactics, or technological factors influencing consumer behavior. There is a dearth of studies investigating the influence of religious experience, Islamic moral principles, and local cultural habitus on the comprehension and execution of daily digital business activities by Gen-Z entrepreneurs. For Muslim Gen-Z in Palopo, digital entrepreneurship serves not only as an economic domain but also as a platform for expressing religious and cultural identity. This lack of representation shows how important it is to use a phenomenological approach that may capture interior experiences, meaning-making processes, and value internalization in Muslim Gen-Z business. Generation Z has a lot of potential as digital entrepreneurs, but they still face a lot of problems, like not being very good with money or technology and not being very confident in their ability to handle business risks (Villanueva-Flores et al., 2020; Kemenkominfo, 2023).

MSMEs, on the other hand, make up 99% of all businesses, employ about 97% of the country's workers, and account for more than 60% of Indonesia's GDP. The consistently elevated unemployment rate among university graduates indicates a deficiency in practical skills and a lack of entrepreneurial confidence, frequently stemming from diminished self-efficacy (Kamaruddin et al., 2025). Internal elements, including interests, motivation, and self-confidence, are crucial in cultivating entrepreneurial interest and maintaining firm operations in more competitive settings (Hsu et al., 2024; Ruzo-Sanmartín et al., 2023). Many people in Generation Z want to start their own businesses because they think that working for a big company is too limiting. However, not all of them are ready to deal with the many problems that come with global and digital competition (Lubis & Handayani, 2022). Recent studies underscore that firms can more successfully engage Gen-Z consumers by comprehending the elements that influence their purchase decisions, considering their elevated levels of technological proficiency and social connection (Ephrem et al., 2021; Alya et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, economic and technology arguments alone fail to adequately elucidate the

entrepreneurial activities of Muslim Gen-Z, especially in areas with robust Islamic cultural traditions. Indonesia has seen significant changes in the religiosity of its youth, as evidenced by the emergence of the *hijrah* movement, digital da'wah, modest dress, and Islamic education through social media. These changes have changed the way Gen-Z Muslims think about morality and live their lives, especially how they handle money. The integration of Islamic identity into digital entrepreneurship exemplified by *halāl* product offers, Muslim-friendly branding, and ethical business practices illustrates the growing influence of religious beliefs on entrepreneurial conduct. MSMEs are important for the growth of the economy in the region (Ntow et al., 2023), particularly in Palopo City, which is one of the new cities in South Sulawesi. According to the Palopo City Office of Cooperatives and MSMEs, there are about 11,022 MSME units in the city. This shows how important they are to the local economy. According to employment data, most of the people who work in Palopo City labor in the service industry, which is strongly tied to trade and small and medium-sized businesses (Badan Pusat Statistik Kota Palopo, 2025).

This structural condition gives Gen-Z a lot of chances to start digital-based businesses that fit with how well they can adapt to new technology. Palopo is in the cultural domain of the *Luwu* and *Bugis* populations and has a long history of Islamic customs that still affect how people do business and what they value as entrepreneurs. People of Gen Z have grown up in a world full of digital devices, therefore they are very familiar with modern marketing techniques and online business chances. This exposure leads to the rise of flexible and low-capital businesses, but it also makes competition tougher and requires managers to have more advanced skills, such as managing money, building a digital identity, analyzing markets, and being consistent with Islamic and local cultural values. Palopo's socio-religious landscape is further defined by a long history of Islamic integration based on *Bugis-Luwu* principles, including *siri'* a pace (honor and unity), honesty, diligence, and communal responsibility. The *Luwu* Kingdom's conversion to Islam, which began with the teachings of *Datuk Ri Bandang*, laid lasting moral underpinnings for trade, leadership, and behavior. To understand Gen-Z entrepreneurship in Palopo, we need to look at economic practices in this historical and cultural context and see how young Muslims are reinterpreting traditional values in today's digital world.

From an Islamic point of view, starting a business is seen as a great and honorable thing to do. An Islamic entrepreneur is defined by autonomy, the ability to see opportunities, and the bravery to face danger. Entrepreneurial activity is not solely profit-driven; it is perceived as a means for personal development and societal contribution. Despite this, low levels of financial literacy and self-efficacy are still making it hard for Gen-Z MSMEs in Palopo to stay in business (Utomo et al., 2021). These constraints require the incorporation of an ethical framework, namely Islamic business ethics, which function as the fundamental value system directing entrepreneurial behavior (Aamir et al., 2023; Tri et al., 2025). Demographic data indicates that 84.28% of Palopo's population approximately 167,324 individuals are Muslim (Badan Pusat Statistik Kota Palopo, 2025), highlighting the significance of Islamic business ethics as a normative framework for local economic activities. Islamic business ethics, based on the *Qur'ān*, prophetic traditions, and ancient thinkers like al-Ghazālī, Ibn Khaldūn, and al-Māwardī, stress honesty (*ṣidq*), trustworthiness (*amānah*), fairness (*'adl*), and benevolence (*iḥsān*) as the most important rules for how people should act in business. Modern academics contend that economic activities ought to be directed towards social justice, public welfare, and equitable distribution, as delineated by the framework of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* (Chapra, 1992).

Asutay underscores that Islamic moral economy prioritizes ethical ideals and *falāḥ* (holistic well-being) as fundamental components of economic systems, rather than as ancillary aspects. In the same way, al-Qaraḍawī sees commerce as a kind of social religion that combines making money with *maṣlahah* and justice (Al-Qaraḍawī, 1995). These ethical principles make Islamic business ethics an important part of how young Muslim entrepreneurs make sense of themselves and their lives

(Mukhoyyarah et al., 2025). Prior research has shown that financial literacy, self-efficacy, and Islamic business ethics substantially affect business sustainability. Financial literacy improves decision-making and capital management (Riska Widya Abiba et al., 2024; Supramono et al., 2025; Siddiqi et al., 2019), self-efficacy cultivates resilience in risk-taking, and Islamic business ethics create trust-based relationships crucial for long-term sustainability (Belas et al., 2024; Al-Mamary et al., 2025). Nonetheless, current research predominantly examines these variables in isolation within quantitative frameworks, providing little understanding of their manifestation and experience in quotidian entrepreneurial practice. Consequently, a significant research deficit exists in comprehending the interplay of Islamic financial literacy, self-efficacy, and Islamic business ethics as experienced by Muslim Gen-Z entrepreneurs in mid-sized cities like Palopo.

This study fills that gap by using a phenomenological method that focuses on subjective meanings and experiencing integration instead of statistical correlation. This research is innovative in its examination of how Muslim Gen-Z entrepreneurs interpret and implement these characteristics in digital business environments influenced by Islamic beliefs, local culture, and modern young religiosity. This study aims to offer a thorough comprehension of the ethical, cognitive, and practical influences affecting the business operations of Muslim Gen-Z entrepreneurs in Palopo City by emphasizing lived experience.

METHOD

This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological approach to investigate the lived experiences of Muslim Gen-Z entrepreneurs in Palopo City about their interpretation and implementation of Islamic financial literacy, self-efficacy, and Islamic business ethics in their entrepreneurial endeavors. A phenomenological approach was used since it facilitates the examination of the depth and nuances of participants' experiences as directly experienced and articulated, particularly regarding their perceptions, interpretations, and embodiment of business operations influenced by Islamic beliefs (Creswell, 2014). In accordance with phenomenological inquiry, the principal objective of this research was not to examine causal relationships among variables, but to elucidate subjective experience both regarding what is experienced (noema) and how meaning is formed through reflection and interpretation (noesis) (Inayah et al., 2025).

Epistemologically, this research was based on an interpretive framework that perceives social reality as a production of meaning influenced by continuous social, cultural, and spiritual interactions (Fatah, 2024). In accordance with phenomenological rigor, the researcher employed epoch (bracketing) as a conscious endeavor to suspend preconceived notions, anticipations, and personal prejudices pertaining to entrepreneurship, Islamic financial literacy, and Islamic principles. The bracketing process was preserved via reflective journal writing throughout the study to guarantee that participants' voices and meaning structures surfaced as authentically as possible, free from excessive influence by the researcher's perspective.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling according to four inclusion criteria: (1) identifying as Muslim; (2) being 18 to 27 years old (Gen-Z group); (3) running a business in Palopo City for at least a year; and (4) showing a real dedication to making the business last. Fifteen participants were chosen based on these criteria, and they were from the food, fashion, service, and craft industries. The sample size conforms to established phenomenological norms, typically ranging from 10 to 25 individuals to enable comprehensive meaning analysis.

The primary method of data collecting used comprehensive interviews directed by a semi-structured methodology, enabling participants to articulate their experiences freely while ensuring coherence with the research objective (Nasir et al., 2023). To enhance contextual comprehension, the researcher also performed non-participant observations of corporate operations. Furthermore,

documentation including social media screenshots, digital catalogs, and images of company processes was gathered to facilitate the analysis of Gen-Z entrepreneurial contexts in Palopo, many of which are integrated into digital platforms.

Data analysis adhered to Colaizzi's phenomenological method, executed through seven systematic stages: (1) reading all transcripts to achieve a comprehensive understanding; (2) extracting significant statements pertaining to financial, spiritual, and ethical experiences; (3) deriving meanings from these statements; (4) organizing meanings into clusters and thematic categories; (5) constructing a comprehensive description of the phenomenon; (6) identifying the essential structure (essence) of the experience; and (7) validating the findings through member checking (Colaizzi, 1978). This study employed the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to bolster trustworthiness through the triangulation of data sources (interviews, observations, and documentation), the preservation of an audit trail, and the implementation of reflective notes to mitigate researcher subjectivity (Husnullail et al., 2024). Informed permission was employed to make sure that ethical procedures were followed, and pseudonyms were used to keep participants' identities secret.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Islamic Financial Literacy as Practical-Moral Awareness

The results of this study demonstrate that Islamic financial literacy serves as a crucial experience element in the entrepreneurial endeavors of Muslim Gen-Z entrepreneurs in Palopo. Participants frequently characterized financial management not simply as an administrative or technical obligation, but as an essential aspect of their religious identity in the context of business. Everyday financial practices like figuring out prices, keeping track of income, separating capital, and avoiding unclear transactions are seen as morally important behaviors that are guided by Islamic ideals and supported by local cultural norms. In this context, Islamic financial literacy manifests not as an abstract corpus of knowledge, but as a practical application that perpetually influences company decision-making.

Empirical accounts indicate that Islamic financial literacy is perceived not as formal financial acumen but rather as a moral framework that governs daily business behavior. Most of the people who answered said that easy recordkeeping, keeping personal and corporate finances separate, and being very open about transactions were very important. Intan Karniati said, "I always keep business and personal money separate, so they don't mix. If they do, we won't know if we're making money or losing money." Sudirman, a chef and business owner, also stressed the moral need for fair prices: "Prices must be clear from the start; I don't want customers to feel cheated." Putri Agni expressed a similar concern for transparency in the fashion industry by saying, "I always explain the size, material, and details to avoid misunderstandings." These testimonies show that people see financial operations as moral duties rather than just business routines.

Islamic financial literacy is evident in practical actions such as keeping straightforward monetary records, distinguishing capital from personal expenses, and continually offering transparent pricing information. In theory, these results align with the Resource-Based View and Islamic Moral Economy frameworks, which define Islamic financial literacy as both an internal asset and a moral guide for sustainable economic conduct (Grant, 2001). This academically indicates the necessity to broaden traditional definitions of financial literacy to encompass ethical literacy, while practically underscoring the significance of entrepreneurship training programs that amalgamate technological proficiency with Sharia adherence.

Islamic Moral Economy theory strengthens these empirical findings by framing financial literacy not just as technical skill but also as an ethical aptitude that guides economic actions towards

justice, accountability, and sustainability (Asutay, 2012). In the realm of Muslim youth entrepreneurship, Islamic financial literacy serves as ethical capital that influences decision-making processes to circumvent *gharar*, *ribā*, and transactional ambiguity. Prior research has demonstrated that entrepreneurs possessing robust Sharia literacy typically display enhanced discipline in financial record-keeping, elevated transparency, and increased firm sustainability (Hurani et al., 2024; Alhassan et al., 2024). Complementary studies by Oláh et al. (2023) further demonstrate that financial knowledge fosters more prudent and ethically sound company conduct.

Participants notably indicated that their comprehension of Islamic financial principles was not solely acquired through formal education. Instead, it grew through everyday work, casual encounters with people in the community, and using digital learning tools. Several informants said they learned about *'aqd*, *ḥalāl* pricing, and capital management through short online courses, *Ustādh*preneur podcasts, and training materials sent out by Islamic banks. This trend shows how digital revolution has made it easier for people to learn about Islamic finance. It has also made it possible for Gen-Z entrepreneurs to learn on their own using technology, which helps them build their religious identity and business discipline at the same time. From a phenomenological standpoint, the implementation of Islamic financial literacy signifies the advent of a moral initiative a tendency to make financial choices that are not just economically sound but also infused with spiritual significance. Participants justified procedures like bookkeeping, price transparency, and capital separation not as external requirements, but as genuine manifestations of adherence to Sharia principles. In this approach, Islamic financial literacy connects economic activity with personal piety, turning business activities into places where spiritual values and local cultural norms, such *lemphu'* (honesty) in the *Bugis-Luwu* tradition, might be realized.

The findings indicate that Muslim Gen-Z entrepreneurs in Palopo view financial activities not solely as technical competencies, but as manifestations of moral integrity and spiritual responsibility in enterprise. Simple bookkeeping, clear pricing, and keeping capital separate are all examples of how being literate in Sharia can help you make moral choices every day. By combining Islamic principles with local values like *lemphu'*, financial literacy serves as a moral foundation that helps businesses stay in business while also aligning economic activities with personal piety. Moreover, the results indicate that Islamic financial literacy is influenced by embodied, practice-oriented learning derived from daily encounters with clients, digital platforms, and community expectations. Micro-experiences, such financial errors, consumer comments, or casual guidance from peers and mentors, function as ethical inflection points that prompt entrepreneurs to realign their decisions with Sharia principles. This research shows that Islamic financial literacy is always changing, adapting, and being negotiated as digital business changes.

Self-Efficacy as Psychological-Spiritual Capital

The results of this study indicate that self-efficacy serves as a pivotal experiential resource influencing the resilience, optimism, and adaptability of Muslim Gen-Z entrepreneurs in Palopo. Participants consistently articulated that their confidence in entrepreneurial capabilities was cultivated progressively through extended cycles of trial and error, ongoing education, and persistent support from familial and communal contexts. In addition to its psychological aspect, self-efficacy is profoundly connected to spiritual convictions, especially *ikhtiyār* (effort) and *tawakkal* (faith in God), which serve as motivational anchors in times of uncertainty and business challenges. These results indicate that, for Muslim Gen-Z entrepreneurs in Palopo, self-efficacy is not exclusively generated from internal cognition but is integrated within more extensive religious and cultural value systems that influence entrepreneurial mentality and behavior.

Empirical narratives demonstrate that self-efficacy is cultivated through mastery experiences,

social support, and spiritual commitment. Informants said that their confidence rises when they do tiny things well, when they can bounce back from failure, and when they work on their spiritual strength. For example, Windi Wandini said, "If sales are slow, I see it as a test." We can't give up; we must develop new ways. Astira Rahma also talked on how important it is to maintain studying to build confidence: "I believe that if I keep learning, the results will come." I also take online lessons to be surer of my skills. Muh. Fadzly gave a more spiritual definition of self-efficacy in the photography service industry when he said, "I believe that sustenance is already determined; our duty is only to strive and improve our services." These stories show that confidence is built not only via skill, but also through processes of constructing meaning that are based on faith.

In practical terms, self-efficacy manifests through proactive entrepreneurial actions, continuous skill enhancement, and introspective accounts of failure and recovery. In theory, these results are in line with Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory, which says that people learn to believe in their own talents through experiences of mastery, social persuasion, and emotional regulation (Albert Bandura, 1997). Empirical research substantiates that self-efficacy serves as a robust predictor of entrepreneurial resilience, especially among young entrepreneurs navigating digitally changing environments (Broccia et al., 2022). In an Islamic context, these findings align with the notion of Islamic Psychological Capital, which posits that self-efficacy is enhanced by the integration of *tawakkal*, spiritual endurance, and a worship-centric worldview (Aamir et al., 2023). Furthermore, self-efficacy has been demonstrated to improve entrepreneurs' ability to adjust to uncertainty and changes in the environment (Zielenkiewicz, 2015).

Participants' self-efficacy is further influenced by their experiences with quickly changing digital market conditions. Informants talked about how important it is to keep up with new trends, changes in social media algorithms, and changing tastes among Gen-Z and millennial customers. These problems call for a lot of adaptability, which is why entrepreneurs are trying out new content tactics, taking better pictures of their products, and making their services more responsive. Every successful change makes them feel more capable, which boosts their self-efficacy through real-world proof.

In the socio-cultural milieu of Palopo, self-efficacy manifests as a confluence of contemporary entrepreneurial optimism and traditional Islamic mysticism. Participants generally perceived failure not as a personal deficiency, but as an integral component of a comprehensive process of cognitive enhancement and skill development. This approach embodies what can be termed a "Islamic growth mindset," because persistent effort (*ikhtiyār*) and perseverance (*mujāhadah*) are inherently connected to trust in divine decree. Bugis cultural values, especially *siri'* (self-respect) and *reso* (hard work), support this way of thinking even more by pushing business owners to get back on their feet after failures and protect their social and business reputation. As a result, self-efficacy among Muslim Gen-Z entrepreneurs goes beyond only psychological confidence and becomes linked to societal norms and spiritual obligations that help businesses stay in business.

At a profound phenomenological level, self-efficacy serves as psychological-spiritual capital that not only fortifies entrepreneurial resilience but also infuses entrepreneurship with moral and existential significance. Informants often characterized instances of diminishing sales, adverse customer feedback, or algorithmic disruption as spiritual trials that cultivate inner strength rather than disheartenment. This act of constructing meaning turns outside problems into sources of moral and spiritual drive, which strengthens a cycle of faith-based confidence. These stories show that Muslim Gen-Z's self-efficacy is not just a belief in their own abilities, but a spiritualized confidence that comes from trusting divine decree (*qadar*), getting help from others, and following cultural norms.

Moreover, participants' narratives indicate that self-efficacy is socially co-constructed through relational networks comprising family members, peers, community groups, and online learning

circles. These networks serve as both emotional support systems and cognitive resources, enabling entrepreneurs to reframe problems as opportunities for growth instead of dangers. A lot of the people who talked to us said that support from parents and friends was important when they were unsure, which made them more determined to keep going. They believe that hard work and prayer can help them find new opportunities (*futūḥāt*) in their professional life. The combination of social support and spiritual belief creates a layered type of self-efficacy that helps Muslim Gen-Z entrepreneurs deal with uncertainty with confidence, humility, and a strong sense of morality.

Islamic Business Ethics as a Moral Practice of Muslim Gen-Z

The results of this study indicate that Islamic business ethics serve as the principal moral framework governing the contacts and entrepreneurial activities of Muslim Gen-Z entrepreneurs in Palopo. Informants consistently articulated that ethical values, including honesty, trustworthiness (*amānah*), justice, and excellence in service (*iḥsān*), are regarded not merely as formal regulations or external duties, but as internalized moral dispositions that have fundamentally influenced their entrepreneurial character from the inception of their business endeavors. These ethical commitments shape their interactions with consumers, product presentations, and service quality maintenance, illustrating that ethics function not merely as normative standards but also as reputational assets crucial for preserving trust and ensuring long-term company viability.

Empirical narratives demonstrate that Islamic corporate ethics are expressed as deeply ingrained and frequently instinctive behavioral patterns, rather than as deliberately deliberated moral choices. Honesty (*ṣidq*), responsibility (*amānah*), and fairness are some of the values that are often talked about as something that can't be changed in regular business. Intan Karniati made this point even stronger by saying, "The most important thing is to be honest; if there is a flaw in the product, I mention it from the start." Putri Agni also talked on how important it is to be honest about products: "I always make sure the item matches the photo." I let the buyer know first if there is even a little flaw. Kharisma Nanda Kartika said, "I make sure there are no misunderstandings by explaining the process, the materials used, and how long it will take," and Asrina said, "I keep quality because it is a trust from the buyer."

These statements show how ethical awareness is built into everyday business and personal interactions. You can see Islamic business ethics at work in the way that service quality stays the same, product information is clear, and customer feedback is clear about honesty and dependability. In theory, these results are in line with al-Ghazālī's idea that ethics are the most important part of *mu'āmalāt* (business transactions), where trust (*thiqah*) is the most important part of long-lasting market ties. Informants elucidated that their ethical obligations are bolstered not alone by religious beliefs but also by robust socio-cultural norms within the *Bugis-Luwu* group. In a culture where *siri'* (self-respect and honor) is very important, lying is seen as a danger to both a person's reputation and the family's honor. Consequently, ethical business practices evolve into a manifestation of individual integrity and a shared need to uphold societal respect.

These empirical findings are corroborated by prior research indicating that corporate policies rooted on honesty, integrity, and fairness substantially affect customer loyalty and long-term viability (Syahrizal, 2018). Patil et al. (2025) assert that SMEs adhering to ethical norms generally achieve more consistent customer growth, whereas Goztonyi (2023) recognizes ethics as a crucial element of reputational capital that supports sustained performance in digital business contexts. These findings collectively bolster the assertion that ethics are not ancillary to entrepreneurship, but rather fundamental to its sustainability and legitimacy.

From a phenomenological perspective, Islamic business ethics among Muslim Gen-Z entrepreneurs can be conceptualized as a moral habitus a collection of ingrained, unexamined practices

formed by the assimilation of religious doctrines and local cultural norms. Ethics are not only expressed verbally, but also demonstrated via consistent practices of customer service, product communication, and adherence to quality standards. In *Bugis-Luwu* culture, ideals like *lempu'* (honesty), *getteng* (steadfastness), and *siri'* (honor preservation) are the foundation of this ethical habitus. When these local characteristics come together with Islamic values like *amānah* and *ihsān*, they create an entrepreneurial mindset that focuses on developing trust over the long term instead of making quick money. The results also show that Islamic business principles have become a way for Muslim Gen-Z to identify themselves, rather than just a way to follow rules. People see ethical behavior as a sign of their own integrity and social dignity, which affects how entrepreneurs see themselves and how they want others to see them. As a result, Islamic business principles form the basis for developing long-lasting reputations and keeping customers' confidence, which are both very important for the long-term success of Gen-Z-led firms in Palopo.

Importantly, the empirical data also demonstrate that the increased visibility and openness of digital markets make people more likely to act ethically. Participants recognized that online platforms facilitate public evaluation, comparison, and review of sellers, underscoring the necessity of ethical consistency for safeguarding digital reputation. In this setting, Islamic business ethics are reinforced not only by religious teachings and cultural standards, but also by the algorithmic logic of digital platforms, where ethical transgressions can swiftly result in decreased engagement and eroded confidence. Ethics serve as both a spiritual necessity and a digital survival strategy, with honesty, justice, and transparency acting as dual moral-technological imperatives essential for maintaining company performance. Additionally, informants stressed that unethical behavior spreads quickly in digital ecosystems, where one bad review can seriously hurt trust. Gen-Z entrepreneurs are motivated to be consistent in their ethics in all their business dealings since they are aware of this. Their experiences show that ethical standards like *amānah*, *ihsān*, and honesty are not just ideas, but are useful ways to protect your reputation, keep customers coming back, and lower business risks. In this approach, Islamic business ethics link religious duties, cultural norms, and the needs of digital markets.

Integration of Islamic Values, Local Culture, and Digital Practices in the Business Sustainability Experiences of Muslim Gen-Z Entrepreneurs

This integrative theme illustrates that the sustainability of Muslim Gen-Z entrepreneurship in Palopo cannot be comprehended without considering the dynamic interplay of Islamic beliefs, local *Bugis-Luwu* cultural traditions, and digital business practices. Participants frequently characterized digital platforms not only as technical instruments for promotion, but as emergent socio-cultural arenas where moral identity, religious beliefs, and local cultural expressions are defined and negotiated in conjunction with current business imperatives. Their entrepreneurial activities exhibit a mixed orientation technologically advanced yet profoundly anchored in spiritual convictions and local customs that define the uniqueness of their enterprises.

Empirical evidence demonstrates that the viability of businesses among Muslim Gen-Z entrepreneurs in Palopo arises from the integration of digital flexibility, Islamic ethical principles, and *Bugis-Luwu* cultural values, including *siri'*, *pacce*, and *reso*. Informants stressed that social media is used not just to reach more people, but also to show moral identity and ethical legitimacy. Aulia Ramadhani said, "Live selling is important so that people can see the products directly and trust them." This shows that transparency is a key value in digital engagement. Annisa also said, "I use Instagram because it's easier to reach customers, but I still post content that is polite according to Islamic values." These accounts show how people are intentionally aligning their online behavior with their morals and beliefs. The combination of digital activity with cultural identity is most clear in the craft industry.

Asrina said, "I make sure to update the catalog every day so that buyers know the latest designs." This shows that being consistent and responsive are important parts of professional ethics. Kharisma, on the other hand, stressed the cultural side of sustainability by saying, "Some products I design with *Luwu* motifs to keep the regional identity." These activities show that cultural symbolism is purposefully built into digital business tactics to set them apart and keep their identity.

This integrated pattern is evident in operational aspects such as consistent social media participation, high-quality visual presentation, ethically framed narratives in captions, and the integration of local cultural themes into products and branding. Theoretically, these findings corroborate the Digital Entrepreneurship paradigm, which posits that cultural identity and moral principles are significant factors of competitive differentiation in digital markets (Hutagalung et al., 2025). Empirical studies further validate that young entrepreneurs who effectively amalgamate religious values, technology, and local culture typically demonstrate enhanced adaptability and a more robust competitive stance (Munir et al., 2025).

From the perspective of economic anthropology, these actions illustrate the emergence of a hybrid entrepreneurial identity that integrates digital modernity with spirituality and local tradition, culminating in an authentic and culturally relevant company model. The incorporation of religious and cultural values is also apparent in the way individuals build online narratives. Numerous informants indicated the use of captions featuring Islamic motivational messages, *Qur'ān* passages, or Bugis terms such as *reso temmangingngi*, *ade'*, and *lempu'*. This kind of material is not just a way to market a product, but it also helps people who have similar cultural and religious backgrounds feel emotionally and symbolically connected to the brand. In this way, social media provides a place for both da'wah and branding, which strengthens the business's moral identity.

For Muslim Gen-Z entrepreneurs in Palopo, digital media serves as a medium for moral and cultural self-representation rather than solely a business tool. Participants responsibly curate information, uphold visual modesty, and emphasize local cultural elements as distinguishing characteristics of their goods. When Muslims and people from the local community use social media, they know that each encounter reflects who they are. Digital moral branding is a type of business image that is both financially appealing and shows piety and pride in one's local culture. It comes from combining Islamic beliefs, local culture, and digital activities. This branding method makes businesses more sustainable by making customers feel emotionally, culturally, and morally connected to them. Additionally, the mixed identity expressed by Gen-Z entrepreneurs suggests that digital platforms serve as spaces where religious and cultural values are perpetually exhibited, contested, and redefined. Participants intentionally shape their online presence to show modesty, moral consistency, and pride in their culture. This suggests that business can also be a way to communicate symbolically. Young entrepreneurs can stand out in very competitive digital markets by using local cultural identifiers and Islamic values in their branding strategies. This symbolic aspect helps them do this. Business sustainability, consequently, arises not merely from economic reasoning, but from the interplay of moral identity formation, cultural expression, and technological proficiency a unique paradigm of digitally mediated Islamic entrepreneurship.

Finally, the results show that internet platforms are cultural arenas where Muslim Gen-Z entrepreneurs actively debate their identities. They create business personalities that connect with people on an emotional level by using *Qur'ān* references, *Bugis-Luwu* proverbs, and culturally inspired aesthetics. Informants also stressed that ethical branding, like not making false claims, using respectful language, and keeping images modest, builds trust with customers and sets a business apart from its competitors. These mixed practices show that business sustainability is influenced not only by marketing skills, but also by the ability to convey authenticity, cultural roots, and spiritual values in digital settings.

Phenomenological Essence

The phenomenological essence of this study reveals that entrepreneurship among Muslim Gen-Z entrepreneurs in Palopo is perceived not solely as an economic endeavor, but as a moral-spiritual journey that significantly influences their cognitive processes, work ethic, and decision-making. The four elements identified Islamic financial literacy, self-efficacy, Islamic business ethics, and the integration of Islamic principles, local culture, and digital practices converge into a cohesive framework of meaning that frames entrepreneurship as an ethically and spiritually infused profession.

Entrepreneurship is fundamentally perceived as an undertaking infused with worshipful significance, manifested via honesty, discipline, self-assurance, and moral consciousness, all directed by Islamic values and cultural identity. Participants frequently articulated that ordinary entrepreneurial activities such as documenting financial transactions, establishing prices, serving consumers, and overseeing social media are not regarded as merely technical duties. Instead, these actions are seen as ways for them to show who they are as Muslims and as members of the *Bugis-Luwu* cultural community. Business activities are not separate from larger value systems; instead, they are closely linked to spiritual orientations (*tawakkal*, effort, trustworthiness), cultural values (*siri'*, *lempu'*, *reso*), and the ability to adapt to new digital technologies like live selling, digital catalogs, and product transparency. On a deeper level, Muslim Gen-Z entrepreneurs see business sustainability as more than just making money. They see it as a balance of economic success, spiritual blessing, and social honor. People see sustainability as the result of moral integrity and spiritual honesty, not just as the result of commercial strategy. Informants stressed that a business can only survive if it is run with honesty, fairness, and a desire to do the right thing. In this way, sustainability is more of an ethical issue than just a number that shows how well the economy is doing.

The combination of Islamic ideals, *Bugis-Luwu* cultural traditions, and digital practices creates a unique business model that shows moral identity and the ability to change with the times. Digital platforms are not only used for advertising; they also become places for moral reinforcement, cultural affirmation, and ethical expression. Muslim Gen-Z entrepreneurs do not just follow digital trends; they reinterpret and use them to create a business image based on piety, honesty, and pride in their community. This combination results in what can be termed digital moral branding, a type of entrepreneurial identity that enhances customer engagement by cultivating emotional, cultural, and moral connections.

In the end, the phenomenological essence of Muslim Gen-Z business in Palopo shows a complex system of meaning in which cultural values, economic activity, and religious commitment all work together to support each other. Entrepreneurship serves as a conduit for the cultivation of moral discipline, the expression of cultural identity, and the realization of spiritual ambitions. Instead of just running firms, Muslim Gen-Z entrepreneurs see them as places where ethics, spirituality, identity, purpose, and economic desire all come together. This phenomenological insight enhances the comprehension of corporate sustainability by elucidating that its roots are rooted not only in strategic competency but also in lived moral consciousness and spiritually informed practice.

CONCLUSION

This study illustrates that the entrepreneurial experiences of Muslim Generation Z in Palopo are significantly influenced by the incorporation of Islamic financial literacy, self-efficacy, and Islamic business ethics in their daily entrepreneurial activities. Islamic financial literacy encompasses not only technical skills but also a moral framework that directs financial management. This includes practices like systematic record-keeping, capital separation, and transparent pricing to mitigate ambiguity. Self-efficacy develops through the accumulation of mastery experiences, social support, and spiritually grounded beliefs, including *ikhhtiyār* (effort) and *tawakkal* (trust in God). The

psychological and spiritual resources are bolstered by *Bugis-Luwu* cultural values such as *siri*, *lempu*, and *reso*, which enhance resilience and perseverance when confronting entrepreneurial challenges. Islamic business ethics manifest as a moral framework characterized by honesty, trustworthiness, and fairness in customer interactions. The dimensions outlined form a moral economic system wherein Muslim Gen-Z entrepreneurs perceive business not solely as a profit-driven endeavor, but as an act of worship, a reflection of personal integrity, and an embodiment of cultural identity.

The results suggest that the combination of Islamic values, local culture, and digital practices creates a unique entrepreneurial model that is ethically based and economically flexible. Business sustainability, as perceived by Muslim Gen-Z in Palopo, is defined by the integration of economic viability, spiritual blessing, and social honor, rather than being solely a product of market strategy. Entrepreneurial practices are situated within a network of meanings influenced by spirituality, cultural norms, and digital interactions. Muslim Gen-Z entrepreneurs establish businesses not only for financial gain but also to reconcile material requirements with ethical obligations and a recognition of life's blessings.

This study contributes to the literature on Muslim entrepreneurship by presenting a phenomenological perspective that emphasizes the interconnectedness of spiritual, cultural, and digital dimensions in shaping entrepreneurial behavior. The findings indicate the significance of capacity-building programs for MSMEs that incorporate Islamic financial literacy, spiritually informed self-efficacy, and contextually relevant Islamic business ethics. Local governments and educational institutions can utilize these insights to develop youth entrepreneurship initiatives that are grounded in Islamic principles and local cultural values, such as Islamic entrepreneurship curricula and ethical digital business incubation models.

Future research should aim to enhance participant diversity and utilize mixed method approaches to investigate the relationship between Islamic financial literacy, self-efficacy, and Islamic business ethics in various socio-cultural contexts. Educational institutions ought to integrate modules on Islamic ethics, digital literacy, and local culture to enhance moral orientation and technical competence. It is recommended that policymakers establish youth entrepreneurship programs that integrate Islamic principles with *Bugis-Luwu* cultural values. Muslim Gen-Z entrepreneurs are urged to improve their Sharia-compliant financial skills, bolster self-efficacy via mentoring networks, and uphold ethical standards in digital business operations. Islamic financial institutions and business support organizations can enhance these initiatives by providing integrated training that encompasses Sharia-compliant financial management, ethical digital branding, and culturally relevant business models.

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