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Competitiveness Strategies for Traditional Markets: A Sharia Economic Perspective in the Digital Era and Global Market

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Abstract

This study analyzes the competitiveness of traditional markets amidst the pressures of modern and digital markets. Using a case study of Batusangkar Market in Tanah Datar Regency, West Sumatra, the research examines technological adaptation, merchant strategies, and the implementation of Islamic economic values. The study employs a qualitative phenomenological approach, utilizing primary data collected via semi-structured interviews with merchants possessing over 30 years of trading experience. Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's interactive model encompassing reduction, display, and verification validated through theoretical triangulation and member checking. The findings reveal that Batusangkar traditional market faces a decline in trade activity driven by infrastructural deficiencies, shifting consumer behaviors, and low digital literacy among merchants. Nevertheless, Sharia economic values, specifically honesty (ṣidq), justice (ʻadl), trustworthiness (amānah), and mutual assistance (taʻāwun), persist as moral anchors ensuring business continuity. These values represent a unique form of non-material competitiveness absent in modern market systems. Consequently, from an Islamic economic perspective, traditional market revitalization requires a dual focus: structural strengthening (improving infrastructure, institutions, and digital literacy) and spiritual strengthening (reinforcing trade ethics and the principle of barakah) to establish a fair, inclusive, and sustainable market aligned with maqāṣid al-syarīʻah.

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INTRODUCTION

Traditional markets serve as the backbone of the people's economy, playing a pivotal role in the distribution of basic necessities, the formation of local prices, and the facilitation of social interaction within the community (Ministry of Trade of the Republic of Indonesia, 2022). In the Indonesian context, traditional markets function not merely as venues for economic transactions but also as socio-cultural hubs that represent local wisdom and the value of togetherness (*ukhuwah*), which aligns with the principles of Islamic economics (Nugroho, 2023). However, amidst the development of the global economy and the rapid digitalization of trade, the existence of traditional markets has begun to face serious challenges regarding competitiveness, modernization, and shifting consumer behaviors (Statistics Indonesia, 2024).

Nationally, the contribution of traditional markets to total retail sales continues to decline. Data from Statistics Indonesia (BPS) reveals that in 2010, the contribution of traditional markets to retail sales reached 67%, whereas by 2023, it had plummeted to approximately 45% (BPS, 2024). This condition correlates with the drastic growth of modern markets and e-commerce, where the value of digital retail transactions reached IDR 401 trillion in 2023 (Bank Indonesia, 2024). This shift indicates that consumer preferences have significantly moved towards the convenience, efficiency, and speed offered by digital platforms (Hidayat, 2023).

This phenomenon of declining competitiveness is not exclusive to major metropolitan areas but has also permeated regency-level regions, such as West Sumatra. In this province, there are approximately 340 active traditional markets; however, 35% of them have experienced a significant decline in economic activity over the last five years (Industry and Trade Office of West Sumatra, 2023). One market reflecting this phenomenon is Pasar Batusangkar, the primary economic hub of Tanah Datar Regency, which is currently witnessing a tangible decrease in the number of merchants and visitors.

Historically, Pasar Batusangkar was known as a central distribution hub for clothing, food, and shelter needs. It served as the heart of activity for society across various professions and social classes, ranging from merchants to farmers and local artisans. However, in recent years, this multi-product function has faded. Currently, the market is dominated by food vendors, while many kiosks for clothing and non-food items have ceased operations. This condition indicates a shift in public shopping behavior, with consumers increasingly favoring modern shopping centers or digital platforms such as Shopee and Tokopedia, which offer competitive prices, cashless payment systems, and fast delivery services (Utami, 2024). From a Sharia economic perspective, this phenomenon is not merely a lifestyle change but potentially disrupts the socio-economic balance due to the diminishing role of the market as a center for the distribution of provision (*rizq*) and transactional justice (*muamalah*) (Asy'ari, 2022). When traditional markets lose their function, the economic circulation of the *ummah* (community) is also threatened with stagnation.

The competitiveness crisis experienced by Pasar Batusangkar is also attributed to low innovation and technological adaptation. Most merchants still rely on manual systems without transaction recording and remain unconnected to digital platforms (Rahmawati, 2023). Yet, in the era of economic digitalization, the ability to adopt technology determines the survival of micro-enterprises (Hafid, 2023). In the Sharia context, digitalization should not be avoided but integrated with principles of honesty, transparency, and public benefit (*maslahah*) in trade (QS. Al-Mutaffifin: 1–3).

Furthermore, institutional aspects also contribute to the weak competitiveness of traditional markets. A significant number of merchants have not yet joined cooperatives or Sharia microfinance institutions, making it difficult to access capital or business training (Amalia, 2022). The absence of Sharia-based institutional systems, such as *muamalah* cooperatives or market-based *Baitul Maal wat Tamwil* (BMT), renders merchants vulnerable to usurious practices (*riba*) and dependence on predatory middlemen (*tengkulak*) (Yusuf, 2024). In Islamic economics, such institutions are crucial as they strengthen socio-economic solidarity and ensure the fair distribution of benefits (*maslahah ammah*).

The phenomenon occurring in Batusangkar also reflects a shift in the local economic paradigm. Formerly, the traditional market was a space for social interaction that strengthened community cohesion. Today, such interaction is being replaced by online transactions that are individualistic and impersonal (Sari, 2023). This shift carries significant social implications, such as declining social relationships among citizens, reduced mutual trust, and increasing economic inequality between digital business players and small-scale merchants (Hasanah, 2024).

In the view of Sharia economics, the revitalization of traditional markets is not solely about economic efficiency but also about maintaining the values of justice, blessings (*barakah*), and proportional distribution of benefits (Chapra, 2000). Islam emphasizes the importance of balance (*tawazun*) between material and spiritual aspects in economic transactions, while prohibiting monopoly and market exploitation (*gharar*, *riba*, *tadlis*). Thus, the competitiveness of traditional markets should be built not by fully imitating modern markets, but through innovation that upholds Sharia values (Kahf, 2014).

Consequently, this study aims to answer the question of how traditional markets, such as Pasar Batusangkar, can rebuild their competitiveness through adaptive strategies based on Islamic economics. The research focuses on three main dimensions: first, an analysis of the phenomenon of declining functions and competitiveness of traditional markets; second, strategies for technological and institutional adaptation based on Sharia; and third, the socio-economic impact if traditional markets continue to decline.

From an academic perspective, this research is expected to enrich the contemporary Islamic economic literature by strengthening the concept of Sharia competitiveness rooted in the values of justice, efficiency, and social balance. Meanwhile, from a practical perspective, the findings of this study can serve as a reference for local governments, Sharia financial institutions, and merchant associations in formulating policies for the sustainable strengthening of traditional markets in accordance with the principles of *maqāṣid al-syarī'ah*.

METHODS

Research Design and Focus This study employs a qualitative approach utilizing a phenomenological method, aimed at deeply understanding the experiences, perceptions, and values internalized by traditional market merchants in facing the challenges of economic modernization and digitalization. The phenomenological approach was selected for its relevance in uncovering subjective meanings and the lived experiences of grassroots economic actors within the context of local socio-economic changes. The research focuses on exploring the resilience strategies of merchants at Pasar Batusangkar, as well as the implementation of Islamic economic values specifically honesty (*ṣidq*), justice (*ʿadl*), and mutual assistance (*taʿāwun*) in daily trading practices.

Location and Time The research was conducted at Pasar Batusangkar, Tanah Datar Regency, West Sumatra Province. This location serves as one of the oldest and largest traditional markets in the *Luhak Nan Tuo* region that remains an active economic hub for the community. The site was selected purposively as it represents the phenomenon of weakening traditional market activity amidst the onslaught of modern markets and online shopping. Field data collection was carried out from July to August 2025 through direct interviews with merchants in the main market area.

Data Sources The data in this study consist of primary and secondary data:

1. Primary Data: Obtained through in-depth interviews with two active merchants at Pasar Batusangkar: Mrs. Ita (a staple food merchant) and Mr. Taher (a vegetable and daily necessities merchant). Both respondents have been trading for over 30 years and have directly experienced the market's transformation from a traditional system to the digital era.
2. Secondary Data: Sourced from supporting documents such as reports from the Trade Office of Tanah Datar Regency, data from Statistics Indonesia (BPS) West Sumatra, academic publications on traditional markets and Islamic economics, and literature relevant to the theme of Sharia-based competitiveness of people's markets.

Data Collection Techniques Data collection was conducted via semi-structured interviews using a formal interview guide prepared by the researcher. The guide comprises six main sections: a) Respondent identity and background; b) Conditions and challenges of the traditional market; c) Survival strategies and merchant innovations; d) Sharia economic values in trading activities; e) Perspectives on the future of traditional markets; and f) Messages and hopes of the respondents regarding the government and society.

Each interview session lasted between 30 to 45 minutes, was recorded with the respondent's consent, and subsequently transcribed verbatim for further analysis. In addition to interviews, the researcher conducted direct observations of the market's physical conditions such as cleanliness, public facilities, and daily trading activities to corroborate the qualitative data obtained.

Data Analysis Data analysis was performed using the interactive model by Miles and Huberman (1994), which includes three main stages:

1. Data Reduction: Selecting, focusing, and categorizing data based on themes such as competitiveness challenges, resilience strategies, and the application of Sharia values.
2. Data Display: Arranging interview results into descriptive narratives to visualize meaning patterns and relationships between themes.
3. Conclusion Drawing/Verification: Interpreting the meaning of the data based on the social, economic, and religious contexts found in the field.

Analysis was conducted continuously from the data collection process through to the interpretation stage to ensure the final results reflect actual empirical conditions. Data Validity The validity of the data was tested using several techniques: a) Theoretical

Triangulation: Comparing interview results with Islamic economic concepts and theories of traditional market competitiveness found in academic literature. b) Member Checking: Reconfirming transcript results and data interpretations with respondents to ensure information accuracy. c) Thematic Consistency: Examining the alignment between field data and the established research themes. This validation approach ensures that the research results do not merely depict the researcher's perception but authentically reflect the experiences, views, and values of the traditional market merchants in Batusangkar.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

General Overview of the Research Location (Pasar Batusangkar)

Pasar Batusangkar serves as one of the oldest and largest traditional markets in Tanah Datar Regency, West Sumatra Province. Located on Jalan Sudirman, Nagari Baringin, Lima Kaum District—approximately 300 meters from the center of Batusangkar City the market is managed by the Department of Cooperatives, SMEs, and Trade of Tanah Datar Regency. The existence of this market plays a strategic role as a distribution hub for basic necessities for the people of Batusangkar and surrounding *nagari* (villages) such as Cubadak, Tigo Jangko, and Pagaruyung. Historically, Pasar Batusangkar has been in operation since the 1960s and has undergone several physical renovations. However, revitalization efforts have been limited to the construction of roofs and kiosks, without significantly addressing hygiene, drainage, or modern market management. This condition has led many merchants to complain about the decline in comfort and the market's appeal to buyers. One merchant stated:

"In the past, this market was very crowded, but now there are fewer and fewer buyers. The buildings are decent, but the toilets and ditches are dirty and smelly. When it rains, it gets very muddy." (Interview with Mrs. Ita, July 2025). Field observations and interviews indicate that Pasar Batusangkar has experienced a significant decline in trading activity over the last five years. While kiosk occupancy rates reached over 90% in 2015, only about 68% of merchants remain active in 2024. This decline is attributed to a shift in consumer shopping patterns toward modern markets and online platforms, as well as a lack of improvements in management and basic market facilities.

The market occupies an area of approximately 3.8 hectares with a total of 982 kiosks and stalls, divided into main trading areas (Blocks A, B, and C) and open areas for daily vendors. Most kiosks are occupied by food and staple merchants, while clothing and household goods vendors are increasingly scarce. Based on observation data and documentation from the Tanah Datar Trade Office (2024), the distribution of commodities sold in this market is detailed in the following table.

Table 1. Profile and General Condition of Pasar Batusangkar (2024–2025)

Aspect	Description	Data Source
Market Area	± 3.8 hectares	Trade Office of Tanah Datar (2024)
Total Kiosks and Stalls	982 units	Trade Office of Tanah Datar (2024)

Aspect	Description	Data Source
Active Kiosks/Stalls	68% (approx. 668 units)	Field Observation (2025)
Main Commodities	Food (73%), Clothing (12%), Non-food (15%)	Interviews & Observation (2025)
Avg. Daily Visitors (2025)	700–900 people	Field Observation (2025)
Avg. Daily Visitors (2015)	± 1,500 people	BPS Tanah Datar (2024)
Infrastructure Condition	Poor drainage, inadequate sanitation facilities, low hygiene	Merchant Interviews (2025)
Retribution & Management	Manual system, not yet digitalized	Trade Office (2024)
Main Market Days	Saturday and Wednesday	Local Tradition & Observation (2025)

The data above illustrates that physically, Pasar Batusangkar possesses significant capacity and a strategic location; however, the infrastructure does not support efficient and hygienic trading activities. Merchants complain about poor basic facilities, particularly cleanliness, sanitation, and drainage systems, which cause unpleasant odors and water stagnation in several market blocks. “In the rainy season, the water rises to the front of the kiosk. Buyers become reluctant to come. We can only clean up by ourselves.” (Interview with Mr. Taher, August 2025)

In addition to physical issues, the market faces external challenges in the form of proliferating modern retail outlets and online stores. The presence of minimarkets in the vicinity has altered public shopping behavior, especially among the younger generation who prefer places that are clean, comfortable, and offer promotional prices. Traditional market merchants struggle to compete because prices in modern markets are relatively stable and the purchasing systems are practical.

From a socio-economic perspective, the market still functions as a space for social interaction for the Batusangkar community. Every market day (especially Wednesday and Saturday), the market is crowded with merchants from outside the region bringing agricultural produce and traditional household products such as *kerupuk sanjai*, vegetables, and freshwater fish. However, the intensity of the crowd is no longer as dense as in previous years. Based on interview data, some merchants admit that their sales turnover has decreased by approximately 40–50% compared to five years ago. The complex condition of Pasar Batusangkar demonstrates that the market faces not only infrastructure issues but also structural competitiveness problems and shifts in consumer consumption patterns. In other words, the decline in market activity is not merely a result of economic digitalization, but also stems from an imbalance between physical modernization and merchant empowerment.

Overall, Pasar Batusangkar still holds a vital local economic function but requires serious intervention regarding facility revitalization, hygiene management, and capacity building for merchants based on Sharia economics. This field condition serves as the basis for understanding the interview results and the analysis of merchant competitiveness strategies in the following section.

Respondent Profiles (Characteristics of Pasar Batusangkar Merchants)

This study involves two active merchants who have long traded at Pasar Batusangkar, representing staple goods and daily necessity sectors respectively. Both were selected via purposive sampling as they met the criteria outlined in the interview guide: (1) have been trading for at least five years, (2) are still active in transactions at the time of the study, and (3) have direct experience facing trade system changes due to modern market and digital developments.

The first respondent is Mrs. Ita, a merchant of household staple goods (rice, sugar, cooking oil, soap, and other daily needs). She began trading in the 1970s and is a well-known senior merchant in the Block B area. Mrs. Ita is a figure who maintains traditional trading patterns based on principles of honesty and familial service. In the interview, she mentioned that the number of buyers has dropped drastically in recent years, and her income has decreased by almost half compared to pre-2020 levels. Nevertheless, she chooses to persist because trading is considered part of *halal* provision (*rizq*) that should not be abandoned. The second respondent is Mr. Taher, a merchant of daily ingredients and vegetables who has been trading since the early 1980s. He occupies a kiosk in the main market area and is known as a merchant who has begun attempting to adapt to the times. Unlike Mrs. Ita, Mr. Taher uses WhatsApp and Facebook to promote his goods to regular customers, albeit simply and irregularly. He acknowledges that digitalization is important but admits difficulty due to limitations in skills and time.

Generally, both respondents exhibit the typical character of traditional merchants who depend entirely on market activities for their livelihood and possess a high work ethic. Their average age is above 50 years, with lower-to-middle educational backgrounds, and they have never attended business management or digital literacy training. Both command high customer loyalty due to social relationships built over decades. In the interviews, both emphasized the importance of values such as honesty, trustworthiness (*amanah*), and mutual assistance as trading guidelines.

Table 2. Research Respondent Characteristics at Pasar Batusangkar (2025)

Respondent Code	Type of Merchandise	Trading Experience	Age (Years)	Key Characteristics & Interview Notes
R1	Staple goods (rice, sugar, oil, soap)	± 50 years	68	Senior merchant; turnover down ± 50%; complains of dirty market; does not use social media; emphasizes honesty & *barakah*.
R2	Vegetables & daily goods	± 40 years	63	Started digital adaptation via WA/Facebook; turnover down 40%; views market needs physical repair & capital support; emphasizes mutual help among merchants.

From the data above, it can be concluded that the profile of merchants at Pasar Batusangkar is dominated by elderly microeconomic actors who work across generations and have not been reached by modern empowerment programs such as digital training, access to Sharia cooperatives, or simple business bookkeeping. Both face identical challenges regarding declining buyer numbers, increasing modern competition, and weak market facilities, yet they demonstrate strong business resilience grounded in Islamic moral values. These profiles provide a representative picture of how traditional market merchants adapt to rapid economic and social changes.

Conditions and Challenges of Traditional Market Batusangkar

Interview results indicate that the current condition of the traditional market faces complex challenges, both internal (facilities, hygiene, management) and external (consumer behavior shifts, modern retail expansion, and digital market penetration). The combination of these factors has reduced trading activity and threatened the sustainability of the micro-economy within the market environment.

Generally, buying and selling activities have declined significantly over the last five years. Both merchants agree that buyer numbers are dwindling, especially since the emergence of minimarkets around the market area. Mrs. Ita stated that before 2020, her turnover could reach IDR 2–3 million per day, but now it ranges only around IDR 1 million or less on weekdays. She noted: “People used to crowd here to shop, but now many go to modern stores. If they come to the market, they buy very little. Income has greatly decreased.” (Interview with Mrs. Ita, July 2025)

Meanwhile, Mr. Taher mentioned that the market is only busy on specific days like Wednesday and Saturday, while other days are relatively quiet. He also highlighted the deteriorating physical condition of the market: “Now the ditches are clogged, water stagnates when it rains. The toilets smell, making people reluctant to come. If the government wants to help, fix the cleanliness first.” (Interview with Mr. Taher, August 2025)

This decline affects not only income but also alters social interaction patterns in the market. Some merchants who used to trade daily now choose to trade only on market days (*hari balai*) due to unstable buyer numbers. Based on observation data and the Tanah Datar Trade Office report (2024), there has been a visitor decrease of approximately 35–40% compared to a decade ago.

Table 3. Trends in Activity and Market Conditions

Aspect	Condition in 2015	Condition in 2025	Data Source
Avg. Daily Visitors	± 1,500 people	700–900 people	Observation 2025 & BPS
Active Kiosk Percentage	± 92%	± 68%	Trade Office Tanah Datar
Avg. Merchant Turnover (Staples)	IDR 2.5 million/day	IDR 1 million/day	Interview (Mrs. Ita)
Trading Frequency per Week	6–7 days	3–4 days	Merchant Interviews
Modern Retail within 2km Radius	1 unit	7 units	Trade Office West Sumatra

Both respondents asserted that market facilities are a primary cause of declining buyer interest. Poor drainage, water stagnation, and unpleasant odors make the market atmosphere uncomfortable. Although there have been efforts to repair some kiosk buildings, these have not been accompanied by environmental hygiene improvements. Field observations show that several market blocks (specifically Block C) have muddy and uneven floors, while sanitation facilities do not function optimally.

The largest external factor felt by merchants is the shift in consumer behavior, particularly among the younger generation who prefer shopping at minimarkets or online via e-commerce platforms. Transaction ease, comfort, and stable pricing systems make traditional markets increasingly less attractive. “Now young people buy at minimarkets. Even for rice, they order online. We in the market have to compete but don't have the means.”(Interview with Mr. Taher, 2025)

Furthermore, merchants face capital limitations. Neither merchant has ever received capital assistance from cooperatives or Sharia-based microfinance institutions. They rely more on trade credit systems from suppliers based on trust.
“I haven't joined a cooperative. If I need capital, I usually take goods first, pay later. If payments are smooth, I get trusted again.” (Interview with Mrs. Ita, July 2025)

Survival Strategies and Merchant Innovation

Despite various limitations, merchants at Pasar Batusangkar demonstrate strong resilience strategies rooted in social and religious values. These strategies can be grouped into four main forms: (1) business adjustment, (2) utilization of social networks, (3) limited digital innovation, and (4) strengthening of Sharia ethical values.

Business Adjustment

Merchants reduce stock to minimize loss risks and shorten operational hours. Mrs. Ita, for example, now sells mixed goods (staples and small household items) to attract customers. *“Now I sell little by little, I don't dare to stock much. If goods don't sell, it's a loss. Even if it's small, as long as it flows.”* (Mrs. Ita)

Social Networks & Mutual Assistance (Ta’awun)

A key strength is the social cohesion among merchants. They help each other by lending goods, guarding stalls, and sharing information. This informal mechanism replaces formal institutional functions. *"If a fellow merchant is short on goods, we help each other. For example, if sugar runs out, take it from the neighbor's kiosk first. Pay later."* (Mr. Taher)

Digital Adaptation

Only Mr. Taher has started using social media (WhatsApp, Facebook) to communicate with regular customers, albeit simply. Mrs. Ita, due to age and low literacy, has not adopted technology. This reflects that digital literacy remains low and requires guidance.

Sharia Ethics & Blessings (Barakah)

Both respondents emphasize that the core of their survival strategy is intention and sincerity (ikhlas). They hold the principle that halal and blessed provision is more important than large profits. *"The important thing is honesty. If the provision is from Allah, let it be small as long as it is blessed."* (Mrs. Ita)

Table 4. Summary of Survival Strategies

Strategy Category	Implementation Form	Purpose/Benefit	Challenges Faced
Business Adjustment	Reducing stock, shortening hours, mixed goods	Minimizing loss risk	Turnover remains low; dependence on old customers
Social Networks	Mutual help with goods, info, & customers	Building local economic solidarity	Unorganized; depends on personal relations
Digital Adaptation	Using WA/Facebook for regulars	Maintaining customer relations	Low digital literacy; no training
Sharia Ethics	Maintaining honesty, trust, & sincerity	Fostering trust & business blessings	Not yet institutionalized in management systems

Views and Hopes for the Future

Merchants possess a realistic view of the future; they realize modernization is inevitable but wish to retain their socio-religious identity. A major concern is the regeneration crisis, as few young people want to trade in the market. "Young people today don't want to trade in the market. They say it's dirty, complicated, and small profit. When we get old, who will continue?" (Interview with Mrs. Ita, July 2025)

They hope for government support not just in physical revitalization, but also in training and institutional support (such as Sharia cooperatives). They are open to digitalization if it is adapted to their capabilities. "If someone teaches how to use a cellphone for selling, that's good. But don't make it complicated. We are old." (Interview with Mrs. Ita, 2025)

Table 5. Summary of Merchant Hopes

Aspect	Merchant Hope	Policy Implication
Facilities	Revitalization of drainage, sanitation, hygiene	Increasing comfort & buyer attraction
Institutional	Sharia cooperatives & entrepreneurship training	Access to halal capital & empowerment
Digitalization	Simple training for online sales	Increasing competitiveness & reach
Regeneration	Incentives/education for youth	Ensuring market sustainability
Social Identity	Preserving Islamic values & *gotong royong*	Maintaining social/cultural function

CONCLUSION

This research indicates that the Pasar Tradisional Batusangkar faces serious challenges amidst the pressure from modern and digital markets, impacting physical, managerial, and socio-economic aspects. Declining buyer numbers, poor hygiene and infrastructure, and low digital literacy are the main factors contributing to the market's decreasing competitiveness. However, despite these limitations, the merchants demonstrate remarkable resilience through their work ethic and the Sharia values they adhere to such as honesty (*ṣidq*), justice (*ʻadl*), mutual assistance (*taʻāwun*), and trustworthiness (*amānah*). These values form the moral and spiritual foundation for maintaining business continuity, even as economic pressures intensify.

From the perspective of Islamic economics, this finding affirms that true competitiveness is not solely determined by capital strength and technology but by moral integrity, social solidarity, and distributive justice. The Batusangkar market merchants prove that the principles of *barakah* (blessings) and honesty can become a competitive force unmatched by the modern capitalistic system.Therefore, the future revitalization of traditional markets must be oriented toward two dimensions: structural empowerment and the strengthening of Sharia values. Local government and Islamic financial institutions need to synergize to create a clean, just, and digital friendly people's market ecosystem without abandoning Islamic principles. This will enable the traditional market to grow as a blessed, humane, and just center for the grassroots economy.

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