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Women and Local Economic Resilience: Insights from Islamic Business Ethics in Maluku's Papalele Practices

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ABSTRACT

The informal sector remains a critical source of livelihood in Maluku despite the province's strong economic growth. This study aims to analyze the role of Papalele women in strengthening local economic resilience, explore consumer behavior toward Papalele traders, and examine the implementation of the Islamic business ethics principle of *ṣidq* (truthfulness) in traditional market practices. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed in Ambon, Maluku. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with Papalele women traders and consumers, complemented by participant observation and documentation. The data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model. The findings reveal that Papalele women serve as key economic actors who sustain household livelihoods and function as shock absorbers in the local economy amid economic and environmental uncertainties. Their contributions extend beyond income generation to maintaining the circulation of local goods and supporting community welfare. Consumer engagement with Papalele traders is shaped by three interrelated factors: trust, time efficiency, and social solidarity. Furthermore, the principle of *sidq* is practiced through honesty, transparency, and fairness in transactions, enabling traders to build consumer trust, reduce transaction uncertainty, and strengthen long-term market relationships. This study implies that local economic resilience is not solely determined by macroeconomic growth but is also sustained by women-led informal economic activities grounded in ethical values. The findings highlight the importance of integrating Islamic business ethics into community-based economic development strategies while recognizing the significant contribution of women traders to resilient and inclusive local economies.

Keywords: Ethics, Islamic Business, Local Economic Resilience, Papalele, Women

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INTRODUCTION

The study of Islamic business ethics in informal economic sectors has become increasingly important in contemporary discussions on inclusive development, social justice, and sustainable livelihoods. While the literature on Islamic business ethics has expanded considerably, most studies continue to focus on formal corporate environments, financial institutions, and regulated business organizations (Yilmaz, 2024; Sulaeman et al., 2025). Consequently, limited scholarly attention has been given to the application of Islamic ethical principles within informal, community-based economic activities, particularly those led by women in traditional markets. Understanding how Islamic ethical values operate in grassroots economies is essential because informal economic actors often occupy vulnerable positions while simultaneously making significant contributions to regional economic resilience and household welfare.

The Province of Maluku provides a relevant context for examining this issue. As an archipelagic region, Maluku possesses distinctive socio-economic characteristics that differ from many other provinces in Indonesia. Data reported by the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) indicate that Maluku recorded economic growth of 7.81 percent in 2024, representing the highest growth rate among Indonesian provinces (Antaranews.com, 2024). Despite this strong macroeconomic performance, the employment structure remains heavily dependent on the informal sector. BPS Maluku publications show that informal-sector employment increased from 64.44 percent in February 2024 to 68.41 percent in February 2025, while formal-sector employment declined from 34.96 percent to 31.59 percent (Papilaya et al., 2024). These figures demonstrate that a substantial proportion of the population continues to rely on informal, labor-intensive, and household-based economic activities for survival.

One of the most significant manifestations of the informal economy in Maluku is the Papalele tradition. Papalele refers to women traders who market fish, vegetables, agricultural products, and traditional foods through local markets or door-to-door distribution networks (Ohorella et al., 2022). Beyond its economic function, Papalele represents an important cultural institution and has been recognized as an Intangible Cultural Heritage by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Sopamena & Pattiselanno, 2021). Previous studies reveal that Papalele women work under demanding conditions, often spending up to nineteen hours per day engaged in trading activities while simultaneously fulfilling household responsibilities (Uneputty et al., 2023). Their participation is primarily motivated by insufficient household income, increasing family needs, and the aspiration to achieve economic independence (Lenggono & Sabaruddin, 2025). Consequently, Papalele women play a dual role as economic providers and custodians of local cultural traditions.

Despite their substantial contribution to local economic resilience, several critical issues remain insufficiently explored. Informal markets are often characterized by information asymmetry, limited regulatory oversight, non-transparent pricing practices, and the potential misrepresentation of product quality (Latupeirissa, 2021). Such conditions create ethical vulnerabilities that may undermine consumer trust and market sustainability. From the perspective of Islamic economics, these practices directly challenge the principle of *ṣidq* (truthfulness and honesty), which requires traders to provide accurate information and maintain transparency regarding the goods they sell (Alhejaili, 2025). Although Islamic business ethics underscores foundational principles such as *ṣidq* (truthfulness), ‘adl (justice), and *mas’uliyyah ijtima’iyyah* (social responsibility), there remains limited scholarly understanding of how these values are negotiated and operationalized within traditional informal markets, where formal governance structures are largely absent.

The existing literature also reveals significant theoretical and empirical gaps. Recent studies have advanced Islamic business ethics through discussions of Islamic moral economy, Maqasid al-Shariah, Islamic work ethics, and organizational morality within formal institutional settings (Yilmaz, 2024; Sulaeman et al., 2025; Alqhaiwi et al., 2024). Similarly, research on women’s empowerment has demonstrated how marginalized women develop socio-economic agency under challenging circumstances (Alm & Guttormsen, 2023; Althalathini et al., 2022). At the same time, consumer behavior scholars have increasingly examined sustainable consumption and the influence of socio-cultural values on purchasing decisions (Santos-Corrada et al., 2024; Delia et al., 2022). However, these strands of literature have rarely been integrated. Existing studies seldom explore how Islamic ethical principles shape interactions between women informal traders and consumers within traditional markets. Moreover, empirical evidence concerning the formation of consumer trust and purchasing decisions in unregulated local-market environments remains extremely limited. This limitation creates both a knowledge gap and an evidence gap. The knowledge gap concerns the lack of conceptual understanding regarding how Islamic ethical values are practiced, interpreted, and negotiated by women operating within informal micro-economic systems. Meanwhile, the evidence gap concerns the absence of detailed empirical studies examining how consumers respond to ethical behavior in traditional markets and how trust is constructed between traders and buyers where formal institutional safeguards are weak or nonexistent. As a result, the relationship between Islamic business ethics, consumer behavior, and women's economic agency in grassroots economic settings remains underexplored.

Addressing these gaps is important for both academic and practical reasons. From an academic perspective, examining Papalele practices extends Islamic business ethics beyond corporate and formal-sector settings by situating ethical principles within everyday market interactions. From a practical perspective, understanding how ethical values shape consumer trust may contribute to the sustainability of informal economic networks that support vulnerable households and local food distribution systems. Furthermore, investigating the experiences of Papalele women provides insight into how gender, culture, religion, and economic resilience intersect within local development processes.

Therefore, the objective of this study is to analyze the implementation of Islamic business ethics, particularly the principle of *ṣidq*, in Papalele trading practices and to examine how these ethical practices influence consumer behavior within the local economy of Maluku. Specifically, this study seeks to explore the economic role of Papalele women, understand the factors shaping consumer trust and purchasing decisions, and evaluate the significance of ethical values in sustaining informal market relationships. Accordingly, the finding is to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Islamic business ethics operates within the everyday realities of Papalele trading activities and how these ethical practices contribute to local economic resilience. By investigating the interactions between women traders and consumers, the study highlights the practical relevance of Islamic ethical principles in community-based economic systems.

The contribution of this study lies in some important areas. First, it contributes theoretically by integrating Islamic business ethics, consumer behavior, and women's agency within a single analytical framework. Second, it contributes empirically by providing evidence from a grassroots informal-market context that remains underrepresented in existing literature. Ultimately, this study demonstrates how Papalele women function as a critical nexus connecting local economic resilience, consumer trust, and the implementation of Islamic ethical values in market practices.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design (Mey, 2022). The objective was to explore and describe how the principles of Islamic business ethics, namely *ṣidq* (truthfulness), *'adl* (justice), and *mas'uliyyah ijtima'iyyah* (social responsibility), are implemented in Papalele trading practices and how these principles influence consumer behavior. Ambon City was selected as the research setting because Papalele activities remain an integral part of the socio-economic life of the Maluku community.

The study focused on understanding the meanings, values, and social realities embedded in traditional economic activities. (Aruqaj, 2023; Mbanaso, 2023) A descriptive qualitative design was chosen because it enables an in-depth examination of social phenomena within their natural context. Through this approach, the research aimed to explain the relationship between Papalele practices and the economic, social, cultural, and religious values that shape community life in Maluku.

Participants and Data Collection

Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with informants selected using a purposive sampling technique. Informants were chosen based on their direct involvement and experience in Papalele trading activities. This sampling strategy ensured that participants possessed rich, context-specific knowledge, allowing the research to capture nuanced insights into the everyday practices, motivations, and value systems that underpin Papalele transactions. By engaging individuals who actively participate in these traditional market exchanges, the study was able to document lived experiences and interpret how economic, social, cultural, and religious values are expressed and negotiated within the Papalele tradition.

Data were gathered through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. To ensure the credibility of the findings, triangulation was applied through several procedures. First, interview statements were cross-checked against field observations to verify the consistency between participants' accounts and actual trading practices. Second, the perspectives of Papalele traders and consumers were compared to identify convergences and differences regarding the implementation of ethical values. Third, observational findings were validated using documentary sources, including relevant publications and archival materials. Finally, an iterative validation process was conducted by repeatedly examining evidence across data sources to refine interpretations and minimize inconsistencies.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics and Selection Criteria

No.	Informant Code	Age (Years)	Role	Criteria
1.	AL	52	Primary Informant (Trader)	Active *Papalele* woman trader in Ambon traditional markets.
2.	MS	41	Primary Informant (Trader)	Active *Papalele* woman trader in Ambon traditional markets.
3.	KH	60	Primary Informant (Trader)	Active *Papalele* woman trader in Ambon traditional markets.
4.	JM	46	Relational Informant (Consumer)	Regular buyer with extensive knowledge of local socio-economic dynamics
5.	NT	38	Relational Informant (Consumer)	Regular buyer with extensive knowledge of local socio-economic dynamics
6.	HS	55	Relational Informant (Consumer)	Regular buyer with extensive knowledge of local socio-economic dynamics

Source: Processed by the author(s)

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using Miles et al. (2014) model, which consists of three interconnected stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation were systematically compared to identify patterns, consistencies, and discrepancies relevant to the research objectives.

To organize the results and discussion systematically, the analysis was structured around three thematic categories. The first theme examined the role of Papalele women as economic actors and social agents within the local economy of Maluku. The second theme explored Papalele trading practices from the perspective of Islamic business ethics, focusing on the implementation of *sidq* (truthfulness), *'adl* (justice), and *mas'uliyyah ijtima'iyyah* (social responsibility) in an informal market setting. The third theme analyzed consumer behavior by explaining how interactions grounded in religious and cultural ethical values contribute to trust formation and influence purchasing decisions. This analytical framework was developed to address the research questions in a comprehensive and coherent manner.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Papalele Women in Household and Local Economic Resilience

The contribution of Papalele women to household economic sustainability is reflected in the experiences of the three traders. AL, who has worked as a fish trader for more than two decades and currently serves as the main income provider for her family, explained that her earnings fluctuate depending on weather conditions and fish availability. Despite these uncertainties, she emphasized that her income remains sufficient to meet household expenses and support her children's education. Since her husband became ill and could no longer work, she has assumed responsibility as the primary breadwinner, demonstrating that women possess the capacity to sustain family livelihoods when circumstances require it.

> "My income is indeed unpredictable. Under normal conditions, I can usually earn between IDR 150,000 and IDR 250,000 per day. However, during adverse weather when fish supply becomes scarce, it drops to around IDR 80,000 at most. Nonetheless, this income is sufficient to meet household needs and pay for my children's education. Since my husband fell ill and could no longer work, I have become the primary breadwinner. For me, women possess the same capability as men to sustain the family economy, especially when the situation demands it." (Trader, AL)

A similar situation was described by MS (41 years old), who sells vegetables and cooking spices.

> "Our lives cannot be separated from the condition of the sea, as my husband works as a fisherman. Therefore, when the fishing season is poor, I must take on a larger role to earn money. On average, I can make IDR 100,000 to IDR 180,000 per day; if the garden yields a lot, it can reach up to IDR 250,000. However, when the harvest is lean, sometimes I only earn IDR 50,000 a day. Even though the income is uncertain, I must keep selling. My principle is that no matter what it takes, 'the kitchen fire must keep burning' [the household must survive]." (Trader, MS)

As the wife of a fisherman, her household income is highly dependent on marine conditions.

When fishing activities decline, she takes a greater role in generating income to maintain household stability. Although her earnings vary according to harvest yields and market conditions, she continues trading because she considers it essential for ensuring that household needs are consistently met.

Beyond supporting their own families, Papalele women also contribute to the broader local economy. KH, a trader of agricultural products, stated that:

> "I have been doing this work since I was young. I bring my own garden produce and also gather produce from other villagers to sell to buyers in other areas. Without the Papalele, much of the local agricultural yields here would undoubtedly go to waste, and small-scale farmers would lose their market access. Daily, I can earn between IDR 120,000 and IDR 200,000. I use this money for daily necessities, buying medicine, and helping with my grandchildren's school expenses. I feel proud because this profession does not only sustain my own family, but it also significantly supports smallholder farmers." (Trader, KH)

Through her activity, she helps prevent agricultural products from being wasted while providing market access for small-scale producers. The income earned from trading supports daily needs, healthcare expenses, and her grandchildren's education, while simultaneously benefiting local farmers.

The experiences of these informants illustrate that Papalele women perform roles that extend beyond informal trading activities. They not only sustain household economies amid uncertain income conditions but also facilitate the circulation of goods within local markets. By connecting fishers and farmers with consumers, Papalele women serve as important intermediaries within the local economic system. Their activities support the distribution of fisheries and agricultural products while helping maintain community access to affordable food.

The intermediary role of Papalele women in connecting producers and consumers is illustrated in Figure 1. Through their trading activities, they facilitate the distribution of agricultural and fishery products from local producers to end consumers, thereby supporting the circulation of goods within the local economy.

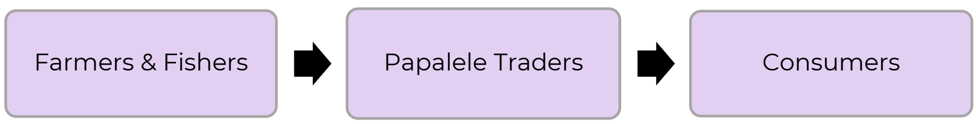

Figure 1. The Role of Papalele Women in the Local Distribution Chain
Source: Processed by author

As shown in Figure 1, Papalele women occupy a strategic position within the local distribution chain by linking farmers and fishers with consumers. This role contributes not only to household livelihoods but also to the continuity of local economic activities.

The resilience demonstrated by Papalele women further highlights their contribution to local economic sustainability. Through extensive mobility and trust-based social networks, they continue to distribute products even when formal distribution channels are limited. Their persistence in linking ports, traditional markets, and residential areas underscores their significant role in maintaining the continuity and resilience of the local economy in Maluku.

Consumer Behavior toward Papalele Traders

Trust emerged as a key factor shaping consumers' purchasing decisions when interacting with Papalele traders. This was reflected in the experience of JM, who regularly purchased fresh fish from the same Papalele trader. Her loyalty was built through long-term interactions rather than promotional strategies or price considerations. As a result, she no longer felt the need to inspect the quality of the fish before making a purchase. Instead, her decision was primarily based on the trust that had developed through an established personal relationship

> "Every day I make sure to buy fresh fish, and always from the same Papalele. Usually, I spend around IDR 30,000 to IDR 70,000, depending on the side dish requirements at home for that day. I no longer bother to check or assess the quality of the fish each time I purchase. Why should I? I trust her completely. This trust did not develop overnight; it stems from our long-term interactions. Our relationship has become very close, so I know she would never disappoint me or provide sub-standard fish to her loyal customers." (Trader, JM)

In contrast, NT (consumer) emphasized practicality and efficiency as the primary reasons for purchasing from Papalele traders. As a home-based tailor, she faced significant time constraints and preferred buying food products from Papalele traders who passed by her residence. Although prices were sometimes slightly higher than those in traditional markets, the convenience and time savings provided by this arrangement outweighed the additional cost. For NT, purchasing from Papalele traders represented an effective strategy for balancing income-generating activities with domestic responsibilities. She emphasized her reasons by stating:

> "My time is extremely limited because I have to meet my customers' sewing deadlines at home. If I had to get ready and travel all the way to the market, my time and energy would be completely drained. That is why I prefer buying from the Papalele who pass right in front of my house. My daily expenditure is usually between IDR 25,000 and IDR 50,000. True, there might be a slight price difference compared to buying directly at the market, but the convenience and comfort I receive are far more valuable. This is my way of adapting to my circumstances, allowing me to continue earning money while ensuring that domestic chores are managed." (Consumer, NT)

A different perspective was expressed by HS (consumer), whose purchasing decisions were influenced by social solidarity. She explained that she occasionally bought more products than she actually required in order to help Papalele traders sell their goods more quickly. In her view, shopping was not only an economic activity but also an expression of care, mutual assistance, and community support. By purchasing additional products, she believed she was contributing to the well-being of Papalele traders and their families.

> "On a daily basis, I usually spend around IDR 40,000 to IDR 90,000. Sometimes, I deliberately buy more goods than I actually need for cooking. My sole intention is to help the Papalele sell out their merchandise more quickly. For me, shopping is not merely an act of spending money; there is a value of gotong royong [mutual cooperation] and care embedded in it. If all their goods are sold, they can go home sooner to bring earnings and happiness to their families. As neighbors, we must support one another." (Consumer, HS)

Table 2. Key Dimensions of Consumer Behavior towards Papalele Traders

Emergent Theme	Description
Trust	Long-term relationships foster loyalty and reduce the need for quality verification
Efficiency	Purchasing decisions are driven by practical considerations of time and effort
Social Solidarity	Purchasing decisions are influenced by communal values and a desire to support Papalele traders

Source: Processed by the author

The experiences of these consumers demonstrate that transactions with Papalele traders involve considerations that extend beyond purely economic calculations. Consumer behavior within this informal trading environment is shaped by a combination of trust, efficiency, and social solidarity (Table 2). Long-term relationships encourage customer loyalty, convenience influences purchasing decisions, and communal values foster reciprocal support between consumers and traders. These factors collectively contribute to the sustainability of Papalele trading practices within the local economy of Maluku.

Analysis of the Role of Papalele Women in Local Economic Resilience

Papalele women play a critical role in maintaining household and local economic resilience. Their participation in informal trade reflects women's agency in responding to economic uncertainty and household pressures. In line with Kabeer's concept of agency, Papalele women actively exercise their capacity to make economic decisions and sustain family livelihoods despite structural and socio-economic constraints (Sopamena & Pattiselanno, 2021).

These findings are better explained through Scott's concept of the moral economy than through conventional profit-maximization perspectives (Putri et al., 2023). Rather than pursuing economic gains alone, Papalele women prioritize household survival and welfare. Their continued engagement in trading activities despite fluctuating income and uncertain market conditions reflects a subsistence ethic in which economic actions are directed toward securing basic household needs (Azizah & Hariyanto, 2021).

The results also highlight the embedded nature of Papalele trading within local social structures. Granovetter's concept of social embeddedness suggests that economic activities are inseparable from social relationships and networks (Wati et al., 2020). Papalele women not only generate income but also facilitate the distribution of agricultural and fishery products, creating connections between small-scale producers and consumers. Through these activities, they contribute to market accessibility and support the circulation of goods within local communities (Saputra, 2025).

This finding is further supported by Polanyi's perspective that economic activities are embedded within broader social functions rather than governed solely by market mechanisms

(Sulaeman et al., 2025). The role of Papalele women extends beyond commercial exchange, as they simultaneously support producers, facilitate local distribution, and strengthen community-based economic networks. Their activities therefore reflect both economic and social objectives that contribute to local economic cohesion.

Papalele women function as important actors within Maluku's informal economy. By sustaining household income, connecting producers with consumers, and maintaining trust-based distribution networks, they contribute significantly to local economic resilience. These findings demonstrate how women's agency, social embeddedness, and community-oriented economic practices collectively support the continuity of economic activities in the face of uncertainty.

Analysis of Consumer Decision-Making toward Papalele Traders

Consumer decision-making toward Papalele traders cannot be fully understood through the lens of neoclassical economics alone. The findings indicate that purchasing decisions are shaped by a combination of trust, efficiency considerations, and social solidarity, illustrating the complex interaction between economic rationality and social values within informal market settings (Putri et al., 2024; Nurhadi et al., 2023).

Trust emerged as an important determinant of consumer decision-making. This finding supports Granovetter's concept of relational embeddedness, which argues that economic actions are rooted in enduring social relationships rather than occurring within anonymous market structures (ChoudhuryKaul et al., 2023). The sustained interaction between consumers and Papalele traders contributes to the development of loyalty, allowing transactions to occur with minimal uncertainty. In this context, trust functions as a social mechanism that reinforces long-term exchange relationships and influences consumer preferences (Hayati, 2025).

The role of trust can also be explained through Fukuyama's concept of social capital, which emphasizes that trust reduces transaction costs and facilitates economic interactions (Munawaroh, 2022). When trust has been established, consumers no longer need to invest significant time and effort in evaluating product quality or verifying information, as confidence in the trader serves as an informal guarantee of reliability (Satarudin et al., 2021). Consequently, purchasing decisions are increasingly influenced by social relationships rather than purely by market considerations.

The findings further demonstrate that efficiency constitutes another important factor in consumer decision-making. This pattern is consistent with Rational Choice Theory and Becker's concept of time allocation, which views time as a scarce resource that individuals seek to utilize efficiently (Fredström et al., 2021). The accessibility of Papalele traders enables consumers to obtain goods without incurring the additional costs associated with travelling to traditional markets. From this perspective, consumers evaluate not only monetary expenses but also the opportunity costs of time and effort, making convenience an important component of purchasing decisions (Anggraini, 2025).

Beyond trust and efficiency, consumer behavior is also influenced by social solidarity and reciprocity. This finding challenges the assumption of homo economicus, which portrays individuals as solely motivated by utility maximization (Arifin et al., 2023). Instead, consumer decisions reflect broader social considerations that align with Polanyi's concept of the substantive economy, wherein economic activities are embedded within social relationships and communal obligations (Akter & Hasan, 2023). Purchasing behavior therefore serves not only economic purposes but also functions as a means of expressing mutual support and maintaining community cohesion.

These findings suggest that the sustainability of Papalele trading practices is supported by three interconnected dimensions: social capital, practical efficiency, and reciprocity. Trust strengthens consumer loyalty, convenience encourages repeated transactions, and solidarity reinforces the social relationships that underpin local market activities. Together, these dimensions demonstrate that consumer decision-making within the Papalele trading system is embedded within a broader network of economic and social interactions that contributes to community resilience (Deti, 2025; Suhartanto et al., 2021).

The Implementation of *Sidq* Principle in Papalele Transactions

The principle of *ṣidq* (truthfulness) functions not only as a religious obligation but also as an important mechanism that shapes economic interactions within the Papalele trading system. In Islamic economic thought, *ṣidq* is regarded as a fundamental ethical principle that promotes honesty, transparency, and fairness in commercial transactions (Panakaje et al., 2025). Within the context of Papalele trading, this principle contributes to the creation of a market environment in which trust and ethical conduct become essential components of exchange. These findings support Chapra's argument that economic activities require a moral foundation to ensure both efficiency and social justice (Sofyan et al., 2026). In informal markets where transactions often occur without formal contracts or institutional oversight, the practice of honesty becomes particularly important. The application of *ṣidq* reduces the likelihood of opportunistic behavior and enables transactions to proceed on the basis of mutual trust, thereby strengthening the stability of trading relationships (Al-Doghan et al., 2025).

The role of *ṣidq* is especially relevant in addressing information asymmetry, a common challenge in the trade of perishable goods such as fish and agricultural products (Farahani et al., 2026). Consistent with Kahf's perspective on Islamic markets, truthful disclosure minimizes uncertainty and reduces the need for extensive monitoring and supervision. In this regard, transparent communication regarding product quality serves as a practical mechanism for protecting consumers while fostering confidence in market transactions. Such practices reflect the ethical teachings of Al-Ghazali, who emphasized the obligation of traders to disclose product deficiencies and avoid misleading buyers (Yudha et al., 2025).

The findings further suggest that *ṣidq* contributes to business sustainability by generating long-term trust between traders and consumers. This observation aligns with Karim's concept of barakah, which extends beyond material profit and emphasizes the long-term benefits derived from ethical business conduct (Khan et al., 2026). Rather than pursuing short-term gains through misinformation or opportunistic behavior, Papalele traders cultivate lasting relationships that encourage repeat transactions and customer loyalty. In this sense, honesty functions as an investment in reputational capital that enhances resilience in uncertain market conditions.

The implementation of *ṣidq* is also closely associated with the principles of '*adl* (justice) and *amanah* (trustworthiness). Naqvi argues that fairness in exchange and responsibility toward market participants are fundamental elements of Islamic business ethics (Supriani et al., 2025). Similarly, Al-Qaradawi emphasizes that honesty in measurement and pricing reflects a commitment to maintaining trust and preventing exploitation (Bhutto et al., 2024). Within the Papalele trading system, ethical conduct therefore serves as a substitute for formal regulatory mechanisms, helping to ensure fairness in transactions despite the absence of extensive institutional oversight (Khasanah, 2025; Hasan et al., 2024).

From the perspective of contemporary Islamic economics, the findings demonstrate that honesty can be understood as a form of social capital that generates sustainable economic value (Ismail, 2023). Trust built through ethical behavior improves market efficiency, reduces transaction costs, and strengthens relationships among market actors. This interpretation is consistent with Fukuyama's concept of trust, although in the present context such trust is rooted in Islamic ethical values rather than solely social norms (Barta et al., 2023). Consequently, *ṣidq* functions not only as a moral virtue but also as an economic asset that supports the continuity of trading activities. These findings reinforce the view that Islamic ethical principles do not constrain economic exchange; rather, they can operate as a source of competitive advantage that enhances market resilience and community welfare (Apituley et al., 2025; Suhartanto et al., 2021; Sulaeman et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Papalele women play a vital role in sustaining household welfare and strengthening local economic resilience in Maluku. Through their participation in informal trade, they serve as key intermediaries linking producers with consumers while maintaining trust-based distribution networks. These findings highlight how women's agency, social embeddedness, and community-oriented economic practices contribute to the continuity of economic activities amid uncertainty. The study also reveals that consumer decision-making toward Papalele traders is shaped by a combination of trust, efficiency, and social solidarity rather than purely economic considerations. Trust-based relationships foster customer loyalty, convenience influences purchasing decisions, and communal values encourage reciprocal support between consumers and traders. As a result, transactions within the Papalele trading system are embedded not only in economic exchange but also in enduring social relationships and community norms.

Furthermore, the findings show that the principle of *sidq* (truthfulness) serves both ethical and economic functions within Papalele transactions. By promoting transparency, reducing information asymmetry, and strengthening trust, *sidq* supports the development of long-term trading relationships and enhances the sustainability of informal market activities. This suggests that Islamic business ethics can operate as a practical economic mechanism that contributes to both market efficiency and community welfare.

The findings provide important implications for policymakers, researchers, and community stakeholders. For policymakers, the study highlights the need to recognize and support informal women traders as strategic actors in local economic development. For community stakeholders, the findings underscore the importance of preserving trust-based trading practices and local economic networks that contribute to social cohesion. For scholars, the study extends the literature on Islamic business ethics by demonstrating how ethical principles are enacted within informal, community-based market settings rather than formal organizational environments.

This study is limited by its qualitative design and its focus on a specific geographical context in Ambon, Maluku. Consequently, the findings may not be fully generalizable to other regions or informal trading communities. Future research is encouraged to employ mixed-method or quantitative approaches to assess the broader economic contribution of Papalele practices and their impact on regional development. Comparative studies across different cultural and geographical contexts would also provide deeper insights into the relationship between women's economic participation, consumer behavior, and the application of Islamic business ethics in informal markets.

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