

DEVELOPMENT AND EMPOWERMENT OF HALAL MSMEs TO ENHANCE COMPETITIVENESS IN ARGAMAKMUR CITY, NORTH BENGKULU DISTRICT

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Abstract

The objective of this PKM activity is to enhance the competitiveness of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Argamakmur City, North Bengkulu Regency. The main focus is to provide a deep understanding of the importance of halal certification and to improve business management competencies following Sharia principles. This enables MSMEs to expand their market and boost consumer trust in their products. The methods employed include training and workshops, mentoring, as well as monitoring and evaluation. Training and workshops aim to provide knowledge on halal certification procedures, halal business management, and marketing strategies. Mentoring is conducted periodically to ensure the proper implementation of the knowledge provided. Monitoring and evaluation are carried out to measure progress and the effectiveness of the activities. The results show a significant increase in MSME actors' understanding and awareness of halal certification. Several MSMEs have successfully obtained halal certification and reported increased consumer trust and product sales. The Halal MSME Development and Empowerment Program has successfully achieved its goal of enhancing MSME competitiveness in Argamakmur City, North Bengkulu Regency. With halal certification and improved business management competencies, MSMEs are better prepared to face market competition and attract more consumers.

Keywords: Development, Empowerment, Halal MSMEs

Abstrak

Tujuan dari Kegiatan PKM ini adalah untuk meningkatkan daya saing usaha mikro, kecil, dan menengah (UMKM) di Kota Argamakmur, Kabupaten Bengkulu Utara. Fokus utama kegiatan ini adalah untuk memberikan pemahaman mendalam tentang pentingnya sertifikasi halal, serta peningkatan kompetensi pengelolaan bisnis yang sesuai dengan prinsip-prinsip syariah. Dengan demikian, UMKM dapat memperluas pasar dan meningkatkan kepercayaan konsumen terhadap produk mereka. Metode yang digunakan dalam kegiatan ini meliputi pelatihan dan workshop, pendampingan, serta monitoring dan evaluasi. Pelatihan dan workshop diadakan untuk memberikan pengetahuan tentang prosedur sertifikasi halal, manajemen bisnis halal, dan strategi pemasaran. Pendampingan dilakukan secara berkala untuk memastikan implementasi yang tepat dari pengetahuan yang telah diberikan. Monitoring dan evaluasi dilakukan untuk mengukur perkembangan dan efektivitas kegiatan. Hasil dari kegiatan ini menunjukkan peningkatan signifikan dalam pemahaman dan kesadaran pelaku UMKM mengenai pentingnya sertifikasi halal. Beberapa UMKM telah berhasil mendapatkan sertifikasi halal dan melaporkan peningkatan kepercayaan konsumen serta penjualan produk. Kegiatan Pengembangan dan Pemberdayaan UMKM Halal ini berhasil mencapai tujuannya dalam meningkatkan daya saing UMKM di Kota Argamakmur, Kabupaten Bengkulu Utara. Dengan adanya sertifikasi halal dan peningkatan kompetensi

manajemen bisnis, UMKM menjadi lebih siap dalam menghadapi persaingan pasar dan mampu menarik lebih banyak konsumen.

Kata kunci: *Pengembangan, Pemberdayaan, UMKM Halal*

Introduction

Argamakmur City, as one of the economic centers in North Bengkulu Regency, has great potential in the micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) sector. MSMEs in this region are diverse, ranging from the food and beverage industry, and handicrafts, to local fashion products. However, despite having great potential, many MSMEs in Argamakmur City face significant challenges to compete in an increasingly competitive market. One of the main challenges is the lack of understanding and implementation of halal standards in their products and business processes. According to Sabuhari et al., (2023), halal certification not only guarantees products under sharia principles, but also increases consumer confidence in product quality. Halal certification is not only important for Muslim consumers who make up the majority of Indonesia's population, but also an important factor that can increase the trust and competitiveness of products in the domestic and international markets (Mya & Handayani, 2023). This is in line with the view Lestari et al., (2021), which stated that limited technical knowledge and access to resources caused many MSMEs to not be able to take full advantage of halal certification opportunities.

Currently, many MSMEs in Argamakmur do not have halal certification, resulting in limited access to a wider market segment. According to Rosnan et al., (2015), one of the main factors that causes this is the lack of understanding of the procedures and requirements of halal certification, which is often considered complicated and time-consuming. The absence of these certifications is often due to a lack of knowledge of the procedures and requirements that must be met, as well as limited resources to administer the certification (Tri Ratnasari et al., 2019). In addition, many MSME actors are still unaware of the potential for increased sales and consumer trust that can be obtained through halal certification. On the other hand, ineffective business management and suboptimal marketing strategies are also obstacles in increasing the competitiveness of MSMEs in this region (Segati, 2014).

To overcome this problem, there needs to be a comprehensive effort to develop and empower halal MSMEs in Argamakmur City. As conveyed by Golnaz et al., (2012), education about the importance of halal certification is needed to increase the awareness of business actors on the positive impact of certification in expanding market access. This development and empowerment program must include halal business management training following Sharia principles, which can improve the operational efficiency of MSMEs (Tri Ratnasari et al., 2019). In addition, intensive assistance in the process of applying for halal certification is also a crucial strategic step. Through this approach, MSME actors can understand and apply halal principles in their business operations, which in turn

will improve the quality and competitiveness of their products in the market, both domestic and international (Anisah & Utomo, 2017).

In addition, capacity building in terms of digital marketing is also important to be integrated in this program. Research by (Thaha et al., 2021), showing that digital marketing is one of the key factors in connecting MSMEs with the wider market, which can accelerate growth and increase their competitiveness. With a better understanding of digital marketing, MSMEs can more effectively promote their products to a wider audience, both locally and globally. This is also in line with the findings by Ritz et al.,(2019), which states that MSMEs that adopt the right digital marketing strategy have a greater chance of increasing visibility and sales. Ongoing mentoring and monitoring are also necessary to ensure that the knowledge and skills gained can be applied consistently and effectively, which contributes to the sustainability of their business (Fidiana et al., 2020). Overall, the current situation shows that although MSMEs in Argamakmur City have great potential, they still need targeted support and intervention to be able to compete effectively in the market. This is in line with research by Abbasi et al., (2018), which states that MSMEs that receive the right support from various parties tend to be more able to adapt and develop in a competitive market. The halal MSME development and empowerment program is a strategic step that can provide long-term solutions in increasing the competitiveness and sustainability of MSMEs in this region. According to Giyanti & Indriastiningsih, (2019), the integration of halal principles in the MSME business model can open up greater expansion opportunities, especially in the international market. Through collaborative efforts between the government, academics, and business people, it is hoped that MSMEs in Argamakmur City can achieve significant progress and contribute more to the local and national economy, as expressed by Tijani et al., (2021), which emphasizes the importance of synergy between stakeholders to support the development of MSMEs.

The main problem in the Development and Empowerment of Halal MSMEs to Increase Competitiveness in Argamakmur City, North Bengkulu Regency, is the lack of knowledge and understanding of MSME actors regarding the importance of halal certification and the procedures to obtain it, which leads to limited access to the wider market. This is in line with the findings in research by Ismail et al., (2024), which revealed that many MSME actors in developing countries still lack knowledge about the importance of halal certification and its impact on the global market. In addition, many MSMEs face obstacles in ineffective business management and marketing strategies that are not optimal. As explained by Irjayanti & Azis, (2012), internal factors such as weak management and limited resources are often an obstacle to achieving better business performance. Limited resources and assistance in the certification process and the application of halal principles in business operations are also significant challenges that hinder the increase in the competitiveness of MSMEs in this

region, as stated by (Juliana et al., 2024), which shows that external influences such as mentoring and training play an important role in the successful implementation of halal certification in MSMEs.

A possible solution to overcome problems in the Development and Empowerment of Halal MSMEs to Increase Competitiveness in Argamakmur City, North Bengkulu Regency, is to organize a comprehensive education and training program regarding the importance of halal certification and the procedure for obtaining such certification. This is in line with research by Azam & abdullah, (2020), which suggests that MSMEs be given more in-depth training on halal certification as a first step to entering the global market. However, this program must include training on halal business management, effective marketing strategies, and the use of digital technology to expand the market. In this case, research by Jailani et al., (2024) It shows that digital marketing strategies can significantly increase the visibility and competitiveness of halal products in the international market. In addition, intensive and sustainable assistance is needed for MSMEs in the certification process and the application of halal principles in business operations. Support from governments, academics, and industry players is also essential to provide adequate resources and facilities, as well as to ensure that MSME actors receive the necessary guidance to improve their product quality and competitiveness in the domestic and international markets, as expressed by the Hidayat et al., (2024), which emphasizes the importance of collaboration between various parties in creating an ecosystem that supports the growth of halal MSMEs.

The target of community service activities includes MSME actors who produce food, beverages, and other products that require halal certification. Budding entrepreneurs, women's and youth business groups, and the wider community in Argamakmur City who support halal products are also the main targets. In addition, this activity targets local institutions and organizations that support the development of MSMEs, local governments, academics and researchers interested in halal MSME development studies, communities and business associations related to the halal industry, religious institutions, and halal certification bodies that work together to provide training and assistance.

Research Methods

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach to describe problems and solutions related to the development and empowerment of halal MSMEs in Argamakmur City. This approach follows the methods applied by Creswell, (2018), which emphasizes the importance of digging into a deep understanding of social phenomena through interviews and observations. The data used includes primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through in-depth interviews with MSME actors, local governments, academics, and halal certification institutions, to understand the challenges faced in the implementation of halal certification and the development of MSME competitiveness. As explained by Neuman, (2002), in-depth interviews allow researchers to gain more comprehensive

insights related to the issues being studied. In addition, direct observation was carried out to identify business practices and marketing strategies implemented by MSMEs in this region. Secondary data were obtained from official documents, previous research reports, scientific journals, and government policies related to halal certification and MSME development, which helped to provide a broader picture of the existing context (Babbie, 2016).

The data collection technique in this study involves the triangulation method, which is a combination of interviews, observations, and document studies to ensure the validity of the data (Flick, 2009). Triangulation is used to reduce bias and strengthen the reliability of findings by combining a variety of different data sources (Patton, 2023). The collected data is then analyzed using thematic analysis to identify relevant patterns, relationships, and strategic solutions, according to the approach described by the (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This analysis aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the obstacles faced by MSMEs and develop recommendations for appropriate empowerment programs. A collaborative approach is also used in this study, involving the active participation of the government, MSME actors, academics, and related institutions, to produce implementable and sustainable solutions for the development of halal MSMEs in Argamakmur City.

Results and Discussion

Argamakmur City in North Bengkulu Regency serves as a crucial economic hub, particularly for the Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) sector. The city has a diverse range of MSMEs, spanning various industries such as food and beverage, handicrafts, and local fashion products. However, despite this vast potential, MSMEs in Argamakmur face considerable challenges in maintaining competitiveness within an increasingly saturated market. One of the most pressing issues is the limited understanding and implementation of halal standards in their products and business processes. Halal certification is not just a regulatory requirement but also a strategic tool to build consumer trust, particularly in Indonesia, where the majority of consumers are Muslim. It also serves as a key factor in increasing the competitiveness of local products in both domestic and international markets.

The development and empowerment of halal MSMEs in Argamakmur City are hindered by several significant challenges. A primary issue is the lack of adequate knowledge and awareness regarding the importance of halal certification and the procedures required to obtain it. Many MSME owners are either unaware of the necessity of halal certification or perceive the process as overly complex and costly. As a result, a significant number of MSMEs operate without the proper certification, making it difficult for them to penetrate broader markets. This is particularly concerning when targeting the Muslim consumer base, which places high importance on halal standards in their purchasing decisions. Without certification, MSMEs find themselves at a disadvantage, as they are unable to compete effectively with certified businesses that enjoy greater consumer confidence and

market access.

Another major challenge lies in business management and marketing strategies. Many MSMEs in Argamakmur City struggle with adopting modern business practices that align with halal principles. Effective operational management and digital marketing strategies are crucial for business growth, yet many MSMEs lack the necessary training and resources to optimize these aspects. The rapid advancement of digital technology has transformed the business landscape, making online marketing and e-commerce indispensable for success. However, a considerable number of MSMEs still rely on traditional methods, limiting their reach and growth potential. Furthermore, the lack of proper guidance on integrating halal principles into daily business operations further hampers their ability to comply with certification requirements.

The financial burden associated with obtaining halal certification is another significant barrier. Many MSMEs operate on limited budgets, making it difficult for them to allocate funds for certification processes, which involve costs such as application fees, documentation, and inspections. Additionally, the shortage of experts and professionals who can guide MSMEs through the halal certification process further exacerbates the issue. Without adequate support, many MSMEs are unable to navigate the regulatory requirements effectively, leading to delays or failure in obtaining certification. Halal certification plays a vital role in enhancing the credibility and marketability of MSME products. For businesses targeting Muslim consumers, halal certification is a non-negotiable factor that directly influences purchasing decisions. In addition, obtaining certification provides MSMEs with access to wider markets, including exports to Muslim-majority countries that require halal compliance for imported goods. This opens up new opportunities for growth and expansion, allowing local businesses to compete on a global scale.

Beyond consumer trust and market access, halal certification also ensures compliance with quality and hygiene standards. The certification process involves rigorous assessments of raw materials, production methods, and overall business operations to ensure that they adhere to halal principles. This, in turn, promotes better business practices, improves product quality, and enhances the overall reputation of MSMEs. Furthermore, the government has introduced various initiatives to support halal MSMEs, including financial assistance and training programs, making it an opportune time for businesses to pursue certification. To address the challenges faced by MSMEs in Argamakmur City and promote the adoption of halal certification, an integrated and sustainable approach is needed. Various stakeholders, including local governments, academic institutions, industry associations, and financial institutions, must collaborate to provide the necessary support and resources for MSMEs. The following strategies can be implemented to enhance the competitiveness of halal MSMEs:

1. Increasing Awareness and Education on Halal Certification

One of the most effective ways to encourage MSMEs to obtain halal certification is through education and awareness campaigns. Local governments and industry associations should organize workshops, seminars, and training programs to educate MSME owners on the benefits of halal certification and the steps involved in the certification process. These programs should be designed to simplify the process and provide practical guidance to MSMEs, addressing common misconceptions and challenges faced by business owners. Additionally, partnerships with academic institutions can play a crucial role in providing research-based insights and expert guidance on halal certification. Universities and research centers can collaborate with MSMEs to develop best practices and innovative solutions for implementing halal principles in business operations.

2. Providing Financial Support and Incentives

Given the financial constraints faced by MSMEs, financial assistance programs should be established to subsidize the cost of halal certification. Local governments can introduce grant programs, low-interest loans, or tax incentives to encourage businesses to pursue certification. Additionally, partnerships with financial institutions can facilitate access to credit schemes specifically tailored for MSMEs seeking halal certification. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and corporate entities can also contribute by offering funding opportunities and sponsorships for MSMEs. By reducing the financial burden, more businesses will be encouraged to pursue halal certification, ultimately increasing their competitiveness in the market.

3. Strengthening Business Management and Marketing Strategies

To enhance the competitiveness of halal MSMEs, business owners must be equipped with effective management and marketing skills. Training programs should focus on key areas such as financial management, supply chain optimization, digital marketing, and branding strategies. Special emphasis should be placed on leveraging digital platforms, as online presence and e-commerce capabilities are essential for expanding market reach. Moreover, digital literacy programs should be introduced to help MSMEs utilize social media, e-commerce websites, and online advertising effectively. Many consumers now rely on online platforms to make purchasing decisions, making it imperative for businesses to have a strong digital presence. By embracing digital marketing, MSMEs can attract a wider audience and enhance customer engagement.

Collaboration between various stakeholders is key to ensuring the successful empowerment of halal MSMEs. Industry associations, halal certification bodies, and local governments should work together to create a support network that facilitates knowledge-sharing and mentorship programs. Experienced halal-certified businesses can mentor emerging MSMEs, guiding them through the certification process and best business practices. Additionally, networking events and business expos

should be organized to connect MSMEs with potential buyers, investors, and industry experts. These events provide opportunities for businesses to showcase their products, build partnerships, and gain valuable market insights.

Conclusion

Argamakmur City in North Bengkulu Regency is an important economic center, especially for the Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) sector, which includes the food and beverage industry, handicrafts, and local fashion products. Although MSMEs in this city have diverse potential, a major challenge arises in the form of a lack of understanding and implementation of halal standards in their products and business operations. Halal certification is not only a need to meet the preferences of the majority of Muslim consumers in Indonesia, but also a crucial factor in increasing the trust and competitiveness of products in the domestic and international markets. Limited knowledge about halal certification procedures as well as obstacles in business management and marketing strategies are the main problems faced by MSMEs in Argamakmur City. Many of them have not obtained halal certification due to limited knowledge and access to the necessary resources. As a result, they struggle to access a wider market and are unable to achieve optimal sales potential. To address this problem, a holistic and coordinated approach is needed. In-depth education on the importance of halal certification, intensive training in halal business management, and the use of digital technology in marketing strategies are considered crucial steps. In addition, close collaboration between the government, academic institutions, and industry players is an effective strategy to provide the support needed by MSMEs to improve their product quality and competitiveness in an increasingly competitive market.

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