

SERVICE QUALITY OF DISTRIBUTORS IN THE ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE (A STUDY ON RETAIL CONSUMERS IN AIR HITAM VILLAGE, NORTH SUMATRA)

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Abstract

This article aims to examine the quality of distributor services provided to retail consumers in Hamlet VIII, Air Hitam Village. The area has approximately five grocery stores that rely on wholesalers in the city to supply daily necessities. The large number of wholesalers in the city creates intense competition among distributors, encouraging them to improve service quality as a strategy to attract and retain customers. In the Islamic perspective, service quality reflects the principle of khidmah, which emphasizes sincere and excellent service. This study uses a qualitative field research approach, with data collected through direct observations and in-depth interviews with grocery store owners who interact directly with distributors. The analysis focuses on five Islamic service characteristics: honesty, responsibility, keeping promises, friendly service, and traders' attitudes when dealing with customers. The results show that wholesalers in Tanjung Pura City have implemented these Islamic service values in their business practices. As a result, retail consumers experience satisfaction and loyalty, which in turn has a positive impact on the sustainability and competitiveness of distributors.

INTRODUCTION

Business is a very important activity in the economic sector. Today, many people engage in business activities through trading. Buying and selling, or trade, usually does not occur directly from producers to consumers, especially when reaching consumers in areas far from urban centers or production locations. Therefore, an intermediary known as a distributor is needed (Kahf, 2003). Muslims who engage in business activities should apply Islamic principles based on the Qur'an and Sunnah, as these serve as the life guidance for Muslims and contain rules that govern every action, including business transactions. In business interactions, one must uphold honesty, trustworthiness, transparency, responsibility, and avoid causing harm to any party (Stanford J. Shaw & Ezel Kural Shaw, 2019).

As time progresses, advancements in transportation access and technology have encouraged many people to start businesses, including opening small grocery shops. Especially in remote areas, these grocery shops help consumers meet their daily needs. To provide goods for their customers, grocery shops require distributors as suppliers. Distributors located far from urban centers are commonly known as wholesalers (Maisarah, 2015).

In Hamlet VIII of Air Hitam Village, many grocery shops are spread across the area to make it easier for villagers to meet their needs. To stock their products, retail consumers purchase goods from wholesalers who act as distributors. In Tanjung Pura City, there are approximately ten wholesalers who help distribute products from producers. The large number of wholesalers creates strong competition among distributors. This competition does not weaken them; instead, it encourages them to continue improving their business performance (Muttaqin & Hana, 2025). As a result, distributors compete to attract retail consumers as their loyal customers. To gain more customers, one strategy that distributors use is improving service quality. Good service can foster consumer loyalty and help attract new customers. In Islamic business principles, service quality means providing good and proper service, whether in goods or services, and avoiding offering poor or low-quality products. (Sony & Arif, 2020)

Based on the background described above, this study focuses on the issue of distributor service quality provided to retail consumers in Hamlet VIII, Air Hitam Village. The main problems addressed in this research include how distributors deliver their services to retail consumers, how Islamic service values—particularly the principle of khidmah—are implemented in daily business practices, and what Islamic service characteristics are applied by distributors in serving their customers. In addition, this study also examines how service quality influences consumer satisfaction and loyalty toward distributors (Rama Dika Fauzi, 2024)

Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to analyze the quality of services provided by distributors to retail consumers in Hamlet VIII, Air Hitam Village, to examine the implementation of Islamic service values based on the principle of khidmah, and to identify the application of Islamic service characteristics such as honesty, responsibility, keeping promises, friendly service, and traders' attitudes toward customers. Furthermore, this study aims to understand the impact of service quality on consumer satisfaction and loyalty toward distributors.

METHOD

This study employs field research with a qualitative descriptive approach. The data were collected directly from retail consumers and distributors involved in buying and selling activities at grocery stores in Air Hitam Village. The number of informants in this study was three, consisting of one retail consumer (grocery shop owner) and two distributors (Grosir Abadi and Grosir Amat). The informants were selected using purposive sampling, as they were considered to have a good understanding of the research problem (Kotler, 1996).

Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. Data analysis was conducted through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation and technique triangulation to enhance the credibility of the research findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Distributors play an important role in the distribution channel. Their role is highly beneficial for producers, retailers, and end consumers, especially in areas far from urban centers. A distributor is a party that purchases products directly from producers and resells them to retailers such as the grocery shops commonly found around us, and may also sell directly to end consumers. In their business activities, distributors, especially Muslim distributors, should apply Islamic business ethics and Islamic economic principles, as well as behavior aligned with Sharia.(Muslihati et al., 2018)

In running a business, consumers, particularly retail consumers, are an essential component, because without consumers (buyers), the business cannot operate. Distributors function to channel goods in order to meet consumer needs, especially retail consumers who then distribute them to the final customers. Therefore, a distributor must be able to provide

satisfaction, fulfill consumer needs, and offer convenience. Satisfied consumers typically become loyal and regular customers; in addition, they help attract new customers.



Figure 1
Distribution in Air Hitam Village

A distributor must also demonstrate good behavior. In their conduct, distributors must instill attitudes that align with Islamic teachings, namely: (Kusumastuti, 2020)

1. **Taqwa** (piety). In all activities, a Muslim is commanded to always remember Allah SWT, especially when conducting business. Every business transaction should be carried out with noble intentions in accordance with Allah's commands, and one must continue remembering Allah even when occupied with managing wealth. Allah has bestowed blessings upon humans, and humans must use them in the best way possible by avoiding deceitful traits such as fraud, lying, trickery, and cheating that may harm others.
2. **Aqshid** (modesty and humility). This refers to an attitude of simplicity, humility, gentleness, and politeness. This attitude must always be practiced, especially when engaging in transactions, such as speaking kindly, behaving gently, and being generous, regardless of who one is dealing with.
3. **Amanah** (trustworthiness) A distributor must uphold trust, particularly in handling the goods they distribute from producers to consumers. Moreover, a distributor must behave responsibly and be accountable for their actions. This characteristic must be possessed by all businesspeople, especially distributors who act as intermediaries. In addition, they must keep promises made in agreements (*akad*) and maintain relationships that foster and strengthen trust from others.
4. **Khidmah** (sincere service) This refers to serving others with sincerity and excellence, and is a fundamental attitude in business. Distributors, in building relationships and interacting

with their business partners, must demonstrate generosity and politeness, especially when serving consumers.

One of the attitudes that greatly influences consumer decision-making is the attitude of khidmah (sincere service). Good service quality is one of the strategies that can be implemented to create customer satisfaction. This is supported by the Qur'an, Surah Al-Isra', verse 53.

From this verse, we can relate it to service quality, namely that one should speak to others with gentle and polite words, as this will leave a positive impression. Similarly, a distributor who communicates with consumers in a soft and courteous manner will create a distinct impression and receive positive value in the eyes of consumers.

In the Islamic perspective, five (5) service characteristics can be used as guidelines, namely: (Rahmat Ilyas, 2016)

1. Honesty. This refers to an attitude of not lying, not deceiving, not manipulating facts, not betraying, and never breaking promises. The concept of honesty is explained in Islam in the Qur'an, Surah Ash-Shu'ara, verses 181–183.
2. Responsibility and trustworthiness. This is an attitude required in business, in which a person must always act responsibly and be reliable. This principle is mentioned in the Qur'an, Surah Al-Anfal, verse 27.
3. Keeping promises. A businessperson who keeps promises, whether to buyers or business partners, will earn their trust. Service can be considered trustworthy when agreements made are fulfilled accurately and reliably. Such precision helps foster consumer trust toward the distributor. Allah also commands His servants to fulfill the promises they have made, as stated in Surah An-Nahl, verse 91.
4. Friendly service. A friendly attitude expressed through politeness, a pleasant demeanor, willingness to yield, and responsibility reflects the concept of serving with kindness. The quality of service provided by traders determines their business success. By demonstrating politeness and gentleness, consumers will feel safe and comfortable, which will have a positive impact on the distributor. This principle is explained in Surah Ali Imran, verse 159.
5. Trader's attitude when dealing with customers. Traders are an inseparable part of the success of any business, particularly trading businesses. Therefore, distributors must be selective and attentive in understanding the needs of their customers.

If distributors improve their service quality by applying the five principles mentioned above, then high-quality service will be created, allowing consumers to feel satisfied and resulting in positive outcomes for the distributor's business.

One of the grocery shop owners in Hamlet VIII of Air Hitam Village, Mrs. Yanti, explained in an interview that to supply goods for her shop, she must go to wholesalers located in Tanjung Pura City. She chooses two wholesalers—Grosir Abadi and Grosir Amat. She has never changed distributors because, since the beginning, the service and prices offered by Abadi and Amat have always suited her well. She once tried visiting another wholesaler, but the prices were slightly higher, so she never considered switching again.

Moreover, the service provided by both wholesalers is excellent because they have additional workers to serve their customers. Grosir Abadi has seven additional workers, both male and female, while Grosir Amat has three. This ensures that consumers are not neglected and are served promptly. In addition, the wholesalers allow customers to take goods themselves when the shop is crowded, while still being able to ask workers for assistance if they encounter difficulties or do not know the prices. When Mrs. Yanti arrives to shop, an assistant immediately asks what she wants to purchase and helps her collect the items. They never show signs of annoyance even though they frequently move back and forth to pick up goods for customers, and they always remain friendly.

The wholesalers also offer delivery services for consumers who cannot come directly to the store. Through the SRC application, customers can shop online, and the wholesaler will deliver the ordered goods. Customers may also purchase goods through the SRC app, and the wholesaler will prepare the items so the customer only needs to pick them up and pay without waiting in line. However, Mrs. Yanti does not use the application because she finds it inconvenient and feels she must carry a phone to complete the transaction. Additionally, customers receive discounts and gifts.

Naturally, there have been occasional unintentional mistakes made by the distributor. Mrs. Yanti once experienced receiving goods in an incorrect quantity. When such mistakes occur, she simply calls the wholesaler, and they immediately send the missing items. The wholesaler also provides good service when she requests a discount for purchasing large quantities, and they grant the discount. From Mrs. Yanti's statements, it is clear that the service offered by these two wholesalers is the main reason she remains loyal and does not switch to other distributors.

Tabel 1
Summary of Research Findings

No	Service Aspect (Islamic Perspective)	Field Findings	Impact on Consumers
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1	Honesty	Distributors apply transparent pricing and do not deceive consumers. Any errors in the quantity of goods delivered are acknowledged and corrected immediately.	Consumers feel trust and confidence in transactions.
2	Responsibility and Trustworthiness	Distributors take full responsibility for delivery mistakes by promptly sending missing items without additional costs.	Enhances consumers' sense of security and trust.
3	Keeping Promises	Agreements related to prices, discounts, and delivery schedules are fulfilled according to the initial agreement (<i>akad</i>).	Builds consumer loyalty and long-term relationships.
4	Friendly Service	Distributors and their employees serve consumers politely, patiently, and attentively without showing annoyance.	Consumers feel respected and satisfied with the service.
5	Traders' Attitude toward Customers	Adequate staff availability, assistance in selecting goods, permission for self-service during busy hours, and the provision of discounts and gifts.	Service becomes faster and more efficient, increasing satisfaction.
6	Service Convenience (<i>Khidmah</i>)	Distributors provide delivery services and online ordering through the SRC application, although not all consumers utilize it.	Offers flexibility and convenience in transactions.
7	Consumer Loyalty	Retail consumers consistently choose the same distributors despite the availability of alternatives.	Creates sustainable business relationships for distributors.

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion presented above, competition among distributors requires them to improve their overall quality, especially service quality. Grosir Abadi and Grosir Amat, which serve as distributors for Mrs. Yanti, one of the grocery shop owners in Air Hitam Village, have already implemented services that align with Islamic principles, particularly the attitude of “*Khidmah*”, as well as the five service characteristics. This can be seen from how they handle mistakes: they take responsibility, remain honest, and keep their promises by providing additional goods when errors occur, without resorting to dishonesty. They also serve customers with friendliness, whether it is the owners or the additional workers who assist consumers courteously.

Furthermore, the wholesalers provide the SRC application to facilitate customer transactions. However, this application is not widely used by elderly consumers, such as older men and women, who generally do not understand how to operate it. Therefore, wholesalers can offer delivery services through phone orders or assist customers who come directly to the

store but purchase goods in quantities too large to carry. In such cases, the wholesaler can help by providing delivery services with an additional fee. This ensures that the service provided is optimal and that the overall service quality continues to improve.

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