

# THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF SHARIA-BASED MSMES IN INDONESIA: AN OVERVIEW AND RESEARCH AGENDA

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#### Abstract

Study on MSMEs internationalization is a research theme gaining more and more attention nowadays. This research aims to explore the state of the art of sharia MSMEs internationalization in Indonesia from both the government and scientific studies sides. The method applied is a literary review using grey literature of printed media and government's official publication, and also scientific literature from the Google Scholar search engine. The result shows only three studies discuss very limited sharia MSMEs internationalization in Indonesia. From the grey literature, this research reveals that various government elements positively support the development of sharia MSMEs. This especially is shown from Indonesian Sharia Economy Masterplan 2019-2024 along with its heterogeneous implementation, including the plan to build a sharia business database in Indonesia. Furthermore, private parties also participate in boosting MSMEs internationalization. On the other hand, the development of sharia MSMEs internationalization studies is only at the early stage, similar to the government attention towards this business segment. Among the academics, this is due to the absence of theoretical frameworks that cover sharia MSMEs internationalization, whether in specific or general in sharia economics scope. It is also caused by the lack of well-structured MSMEs business performance database and the unobvious concepts of sharia MSMEs elements. Therefore, it is recommended that theoretical studies filling the gap, especially in economic aspects, such as financial resources flow as well as empirical studies such as survey, financing, innovation, and consumer's determinant, are conducted.

*Keywords*: MSMEs Internationalization, Sharia MSMEs, Islamic Economy, Halal Industry.

# INTRODUCTION

MSMEs internationalization has been a research focus for many years. Ribau, Moreira, & Raposo (2016) found that in 1977-2014, 554 papers on MSMEs internationalization were published. In its development, it is revealed that internationalization is influenced by three major factors: businessman/manager factor, company factor, and external environment factor (Terjesen, Hessels, & Li, 2016). Various themes have surfaced, from resources issue, capability, strategy to general internationalization phenomena to relate internationalization and the company's performance (Knight & Liesch, 2016). In accordance with this, recommendations on future internationalization research have been proposed to better understand MSMEs internationalization phenomenon (Ribauet al., 2016; Knight andLiesch, 2016).

One of MSMEs blooming in the third world, especially countries with significant Muslim population, is sharia MSMEs. Sharia MSMEs group is a business application from Islamic economy. The attention towards sharia economy has emerged at least since 1976 when Mecca Conference was conducted to develop a discipline capable of providing the solution for modern capitalism system (Shafiq, 2019). Islamic economy has different characteristics since it prioritized huquq (obligation) instead of self-interest, maximize people's benefit (maslahah) and faith



(taqwa)(Furqani, 2015). Currently, it is estimated that 73 scientific journals dedicate themselves to various Islamic economy aspects (Shafiq, 2019).

The great interest in sharia businesses has proposed a question on how MSMEs internationalization studies develop nowadays. For Indonesia, a country with the largest Muslim population, the sharia business internationalization involves not only economical but also political issues. In his speech during the presidential debate, the now-president candidate, Joko Widodo, stated that the orientation of the Indonesian future economy in 2019-2024 is sharia economy. The elected president promises that he will encourage the sharia economy and export in large amount to the world's Muslim countries (Moneysmart, 2019). That is normal because even though it has the largest Muslim population in the world, Indonesia is ranked in 10. Out of the six-sharia economic sectors, Indonesia is mostly placed in the second position for modest fashion. In halal travel, it is in the fourth position. In Islamic finance, Indonesia is in the 10th position. Meanwhile, in halal food, halal media and recreation, and halal pharmaceuticals and cosmetics, it fails to join the top 10 (Thomson-Reuters & Dinar Standard, 2018).

Moreover, although internationalization studies and sharia economy emerged at the same time around the 1970s, very few studies discuss sharia MSMEs internationalization. One of the signature features of the sharia economy is the financing system based on profit sharing instead of on interests (Akhtar, Akhter, & Shahbaz, 2015). This makes sharia MSMEs internationalization closely relates to the financing aspect. However, even in common MSMEs internationalization; financing is an issue rarely surfaces (Ribauet al., 2016). Facing the lack of discussion on sharia MSMEs internationalization, this article aims to gather some research and fact carried out locally in Indonesia to explore the development of sharia business internationalization. The review will then bring out some topic recommendations for the coming research related to the sharia MSMEs internationalization in Indonesia and other countries, especially those with a significant Muslim population.

# METHODOLOGY

This research applies searching protocol using two clusters of keywords. The first group includes "Islamic", "sharia", and "halal", while the second involves "export" and "internationalization." Both are then combined into four pairs of keywords. Each pair is then used to search the articles from 2015-2019 in Google Scholar. Two language versions, Indonesian and English, are used. English is used in the specific search where the word "Indonesia" is added. Nevertheless, we can only find three scientific articles in the process. Moreover, only one of the three is an empirical study (Mopangga & Niode, 2017). The other two are potential studies that are theoretical (Anggara, 2017; Fithriana & Kusuma, 2018). To compensate the few existing research found, we carried out a similar searching protocol in Google News. The protocol generates some news that can be used to describe sharia MSMEs internationalization in Indonesia.

# FINDINGS

In early 2019, the minister of PPN/Bappenas stated that Indonesian halal product export increased as much as 19,2% in 2017 from the previous year that was USD 29,7 billion (Liputan6, 2019). The government will encourage this enhancement more by providing incentives, especially to food products. The support will prioritize MSMEs because many of the food products are produced by this industry. PPN/Bappenas ministry launched an Indonesia Sharia Economy Masterplan 2019-2024 in 2018 (Kementerian PPN/Bappenas, 2018). This masterplan has resources, one of which is the Development Blueprint of Sharia Economy and Finance initiated by the Indonesia Bank the previous year(Bank Indonesia, 2017). In a program to realize Indonesia as a centre of advanced sharia economy in the world, the government runs four strategies. One of them is reinforcing sharia MSMEs. There are four main programs in the strategy: an educational program for micro-



Performance. Volume 29 Nomor 1 Tahun 2022, 74-81 business, integrated financing for MSMEs, MSMEs database, and MSMEs literacy program. In line with this, the Indonesia Bank will initiate a sharia economy statistic data for the first time in Indonesia (Republika, 2019a). As slow as it is, because the sharia economy has developed since the 1990s in Indonesia, the existence of sharia economy statistic will aid the planning of internationalization strategies for sharia businesses in Indonesia.

Besides, the PPN/Bappenas ministry regards halal certification as a crucial element in sharia MSMEs internationalization and thus will encourage this aspect in the future. This suits other research in other countries that imply the halal certification as an important element in sharia MSMEs internationalization (Dubé, Haijuan, & Lijun, 2016; Dubé, Hongxia, & Lijun, 2016; Sriviboone & Komolsevin, 2018). Meanwhile, the Ministry of Cooperative and MSMEs keeps on conducting the training to increase the MSMEs export orientation. This includes sharia MSMEs. This ministry claims that all this time, the problems faced by Indonesian MSMEs in internationalization is knowledge and uniqueness. They lack of knowledge in product specification demanded by the market, market intelligence, market-rule knowledge, and business competitor knowledge (Republika, 2019b).

The Ministry of Industry applies another strategy. They plan to create bonded sharia industrial areas in Indonesia. Four industrial areas have been prepared for this namely Batamindo Industrial Estate, Bintan Industrial Park, Jakarta Industrial Estate Pulogadung, and Modern Cikande Industrial Estate. They are supported by certification office and halal logistics transportation. The ministry also ensures that halal certification will be a mandatory requirement for both large and small scale industry beginning from 17 October 2019 (Pikiran Rakyat, 2019). On the other side, the Indonesian Bank aim pesantren, an Islamic education institutional, to develop sharia business that will lead to internationalization. They aim 29 thousand pesantrens in Indonesia, one of which with the best practice is Pesantren Al-Ihya Pandeglang. This pesantren has a coconut processing unit whose products have been exported throughout countries in Asia. The Indonesian Bank will build a pesantren network and regular MSMEs that are supported by Export-Import Financing Institution (LPEI)/Eximbankto accompany and connect pesantren halal products to various countries, especially the Middle East (Liputan6, 2018).

Export targets from various government institutions are Islamic countries. This is supported by the ICCIA (Islamic Chamber of Commerce, Industry, and Agriculture) meeting in 2018. Indonesian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (Kadin) predict that Indonesian export to Islamic countries will increase by 5% out of the total export in 2017 to 10% in the next few years (Kontan, 2018). A case study in fish corn stick businesses in Gorontalo shows that the program initiated by the government to encourage internationalization, including halal certification, yields effective results. The business network formed by the industry involves the government, banking, non-governmental organization, and university. Thanks to this network, challenges of quality, permit, packaging, work labour, halalness, production chamber, financing administration, marketing, and selling can be overcome (Mopangga & Niode, 2017).

Not only the government, but also a foreign investor Whita Japan Corporation has also started a plan to develop global business by standing on sharia MSMEs based in West Sumatra. Whit a cooperates with some businesses to channel West Sumatra sharia MSMEs products to various places in the world in a mutually lucrative deal among the businessmen, government, and the society (Minangkabau News, 2019). Among the academics, the existing development is still limited to the applicative level. There has not been any real theoretical development in it. The two research articles found discuss the ASEAN market strategic judgment towards Indonesian sharia food product (Anggara, 2017) and the review towards the implementation of sharia food product policy as the competitive advantage in ASEAN market (Fithriana & Kusuma, 2018). Both studies highlight the food sector of ASEAN markets. Little attention was given to MSMEs in these studies. Anggara (2017) sees that MSMEs incubation and sharia agroindustry start-up is one of the nine opportunities for Indonesian sharia agroindustry to aim the ASEAN market. On the other side, it is mentioned that the lack of funding to support sharia MSMEs' update and innovation has become



Performance. Volume 29 Nomor 1 Tahun 2022, 74-81 one of the four weaknesses in Indonesian agroindustry. A study conducted by Fithriana and Kusuma (2018) also mentions sharia MSMEs. Both researchers reiterate that halal certification is a crucial element in encouraging the internationalization of sharia food sector in ASEAN.

# INSIGHT FROM THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF SHARIA BUSINESS IN INDONESIA

The above review shows that the sharia business internationalization from Indonesia does not get specific attention. There is no reliable statistic data to be used as a basic source of decisionmaking or further research. The government cannot even estimate the number of the overall sharia business now existing in Indonesia. Likewise, there is no clear definition for sharia MSMEs (halal MSMEs) in the Indonesia Sharia Economy Masterplan. The government implies that there are two kinds of sharia MSMEs, namely common MSMEs applying sharia financing and/or halal certification and specific MSMEs that produce sharia-based products (sharia food, sharia financing, halal travel, modest fashion, halal media and recreation, and halal pharmaceuticals and cosmetics). The MSMEs with sharia banking financing or halal certification do not necessarily produce one of the six above-mentioned sharia-based products/services. An example is the mining and energy sector, which is not a sharia-based product. This displays confusion in determining what sharia MSMEs are, whether they are decided from the input or the output. Studies on sharia MSMEs internationalization are also scarce internationally. A study by Yang, Dubé, & Huang (2016) reveals that halal food-producing MSMEs internationalization is influenced by halal certification, halal logistics, trade constraints, and language constraints. Another study in Malaysia shows that some factors – halal certification, entrepreneur attitude, cross-cultural marketing, government's absence of resources initiatives, and inefficient supply chain - affect the internationalization for MSMEs producing halal food (M. Ismail, Yahya, & Othman, 2016).N. A. Ismail (2017) adds the number of export-destination countries (geographical scope) as a determinant factor in halal MSMEs performance in Malaysia. So far, the studies on sharia MSMEs internationalization are limited in other countries too and their discussions are also limited in the internationalization determinants. There is no effort to develop the theoretical aspect or to have cross-nation research to understand MSMEs internationalization. Topics such as financing, strategy, marketing, or innovation (Ribau et al., 2016)are still unexplored.

# WHAT MAKES SHARIA-BASED SME INTERNATIONALIZATION STUDY SCARCE?

The few studies available in sharia MSMEs internationalization can be attributed to several factors. At least four factors influence the limited number of research in MSMEs internationalization. First, supporting literature for alternative capitalism economy system based on a system without interest is not available yet. There are some conceptual studies on Islamic economy (Furqani, 2015; Mansour & Bhatti, 2018),but they are more descriptive than predictive. There is no proposition brought up, and that makes those theories can be falsified. Studies on sharia economy still stand on theories or the results of non-sharia-based-economy empirical studies.

Therefore, the second obstacle is the absence of a comprehensive sharia economy framework that connects sharia economic elements in its relation with internationalization, growth, and business performance. The Indonesian Bank and Indonesia Ulama Council (MUI) have discussed this issue and the results have been used as the blueprint general framework of sharia economy and financing development (Bank Indonesia, 2017). Nevertheless, this framework is not comprehensive enough as it does not include internationalization, growth, and performance variables. Besides, it is a result of experience-based discussion which is more theoretical instead of empirical. The third obstacle is the absence of access to the sharia MSMEs performance database. It is due to the unavailability of a detailed statistics database that differentiates sharia MSMEs from other MSMEs. The government has just begun to have a census to build this database. Thus, sharia MSMEs studies mostly use very general and unrepresentative data.



Performance. Volume 29 Nomor 1 Tahun 2022, 74-81 The last constraint is the unclear concept of business strategy to distinguish halal business elements and conventional business elements. There are possibilities that MSMEs internationalization studies in Indonesia also include sharia MSMEs internationalization studies (Cahyadi, 2015; Hutami & Maharani, 2018; Revindo, 2017; Revindo & Gan, 2016, 2018). However, since there is no clear identifier for these MSMEs, the studies cannot generate the difference of sharia MSMEs and common MSMEs.

# DISCUSSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Various limitations that lead to the few number of studies on sharia MSMEs internationalization in Indonesia and other countries should still propose some research directions. They are among other:

### Innovation study on sharia MSMEs

Innovation study on sharia MSMEs will describe sharia MSMEs uniqueness. An example is what kind of innovation is a sharia innovation. In addition, whether or not it has different features from common MSMEs. This study can also explore the new aspects of sharia products as well as learn how the innovations yield result in MSMEs internationalization. It can also examine the surrounding aspects such as R & D investment, product diversity, technology strategy, MSMEs collaboration with universities, intellectual property rights, and patent (Ribauet al., 2016). The study will be relevant to the industry 4.0 context that is now a primary theme for future studies in the economy.

### Determinant study from the consumers' side

There are many studies nowadays exploring the determinants from the origin countries such as export barriers, halal certification, and so forth. The determinants from the consumers' side are still unexplored. These are not merely variables like a market barrier, but also consumers' psychological variables. An example is when the government identifies factors encouraging MSMEs internationalization, which are certification, agglomeration, knowledge, and product competitiveness; they are assuming that sharia MSMEs products will only be consumed by the Muslim market. Opportunities for non-Muslim markets are not mentioned, as potential as they are. Even when these markets are targeted, the government assumes that halal certification should solve the problem. Halal certification closely corresponds to product freshness, cleanliness, and quality. However, there is another factor influencing sharia MSMEs product internationalization, namely islamophobia (Ruiz-Bejarano, 2017). Islamophobia is relevant because these days global relations among religions are fluctuated. This is a political factor playing role in economic development, which is similar to marketing psychology factor like foreignness, country of origin image, and consumers' ethnocentrisms (Leonidou, Katsikeas, Samiee, & Aykol, 2018).

#### Sharia MSMEs survey

The sharia MSMEs survey is a simple descriptive study that helps in developing further studies in sharia MSMEs internationalization. It involves listing the sharia MSMEs, their profiles, the founder's religion, and their internationalization level. It is true that now the government has started to do data collection, but academicians' contributions will fasten the process. They can also compare the results yielded by the government with their results, especially from the microeconomics side.

#### Sharia MSMEs financing study

The financing study is a scarce study in internationalization (Ribauet al., 2016). Sharia MSMEs internationalization offers a unique financing concept. This creates opportunities for the academicians to explore the uniqueness and contribute to MSMEs study in general. They can study the sharia MSMEs financing mechanism in exporting, the impact of sharia banking and financing towards sharia MSMEs internationalization, the methods to make ZISWAF fund (zakat, infaq, sadaqah, and waqaf) (Tanjung, 2018) financing the sharia MSMEs export expenses.



# Theoretical study on sharia MSMEs financial resources

Up to now, there has not been any comprehensive resources flow theory that connects input, process, output, and impact. Still also absent are economic feedbacks capable of relating financing process, production, selling, welfare effect, and ZISWAF fund in one sustainable cycle. ZISWAF may take various forms and are constructive. They are philanthropic activities, which can be productive and consumptive. When productive, ZISWAF is potential in indirectly encouraging internationalization by providing donations, lands, or anything given to fellow Muslims. This results in resources flow in a network sustaining internationalization activities (Nyuur, Brecic, & Debrah, 2018).

# CONCLUSION

In this article, we identify the absence of studies on sharia business internationalization in Indonesia. Some research opportunities can be taken to contribute to sharia MSMEs study in a broader scope. They include theoretical studies, like financial resource flow study, and empirical studies, such as surveys, financing, innovation, and determinants from the consumers' side. It is expected that this offer trigger further development in sharia MSMEs, theoretically, empirically, and practically.

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