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Muru'ah as a Mediator of Innovation Performance in Local Snack Industry

Muru'ah sebagai Mediator Kinerja Inovasi pada Industri Makanan Ringan Lokal

Sitti Nurlinda¹, Syaparuddin Razak², Jumarni³

¹Islamic Economics Departement, State Islamic Institute of Bone, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, sittinurlinda05@gmail.com

²Islamic Economics Departement, State Islamic Institute of Bone, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, safarb135@gmail.com

³Islamic Business Management Departement, State Islamic Institute of Bone, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, jojo.jumarni@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study examines the mediating role of *murū'ah* in the relationship between social networks, trust, external collaboration, and product innovation among local snack MSMEs in Bone Regency. Grounded in Social Capital Theory and Open Innovation Theory, the research uses a quantitative explanatory approach and analyzes data from 153 entrepreneurs through PLS-SEM. Results confirm strong validity and show that social networks and trust significantly enhance external collaboration. Collaboration further strengthens *murū'ah*, which then exerts a substantial influence on product innovation. The findings demonstrate a full mediation effect, indicating that relational resources contribute to innovation only when transformed through collaborative engagement and internalized ethical values. As an ethical capability rooted in integrity and responsibility, *murū'ah* directs innovation toward accountable and value-driven outcomes. The study advances Islamic business ethics literature and highlights the need to reinforce ethical awareness, collaborative mechanisms, and trust-building to promote sustainable MSME innovation.

Keywords: Muru'ah, Social Networks, Trust, External Collaboration, Product Innovation, MSMEs, PLS-SEM.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji peran mediasi *murū'ah* dalam hubungan antara jejaring sosial, kepercayaan, kolaborasi eksternal, dan inovasi produk pada pelaku UMKM makanan ringan di Kabupaten Bone. Berlandaskan Teori Modal Sosial dan Teori Inovasi Terbuka, studi ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif eksplanatori dan menganalisis data dari 153 responden melalui PLS-SEM. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan validitas yang kuat serta mengonfirmasi bahwa jejaring sosial dan kepercayaan berpengaruh signifikan terhadap kolaborasi eksternal. Kolaborasi kemudian memperkuat *murū'ah*, yang selanjutnya memengaruhi inovasi produk secara substansial. Temuan ini menegaskan adanya mediasi penuh, sehingga sumber daya relasional berkontribusi pada inovasi hanya ketika diterjemahkan melalui kolaborasi dan nilai moral yang terinternalisasi. Sebagai kapabilitas etis yang berakar pada integritas dan tanggung jawab, *murū'ah* mengarahkan inovasi menuju praktik yang akuntabel dan berorientasi nilai. Studi ini memperkaya literatur etika bisnis Islam serta menekankan pentingnya penguatan kesadaran etis, mekanisme kolaboratif, dan pembangunan kepercayaan untuk mendorong inovasi UMKM yang berkelanjutan.

Kata kunci: Muru'ah, Jejaring Sosial, Kepercayaan, Kolaborasi Eksternal, Inovasi Produk, UMKM, PLS-SEM.

I. INTRODUCTION

Muru'ah encourages local snack entrepreneurs to engage in purposeful innovation through product quality enhancement, cultural value preservation, and service improvement anchored in business honor and ethical integrity (I. Ismail et

al., 2025). This ethical impetus is reflected in their commitment to ensuring authentic taste, hygiene, food safety, and the use of high-quality local ingredients to protect business reputation (Hidayati et al., 2024). Entrepreneurs also introduce culturally embedded innovations by modernizing traditional recipes while retaining local identity, thereby positioning their products as both market-oriented goods and expressions of cultural heritage (I. Ismail et al., 2025). Complementary service and branding innovations such as eco-friendly packaging, authentic brand narratives, and transparent communication further reinforce consumer trust (Anggraini et al., 2025). Overall, these practices illustrate that *muru'ah* operates not merely as a moral trait but as an ethical foundation that supports dignified, competitive, and sustainable business growth (Riani et al., 2025).

Research on the role of *muru'ah* in fostering product innovation among local snack-food entrepreneurs remains limited, despite extensive discussions of this value in business ethics, socio-cultural studies, and Islamic law. In business ethics, prior works emphasize that *muru'ah* reflecting honesty, fairness, responsibility, and ethical awareness provides a crucial foundation for ethical decision-making, competitiveness, and the long-term sustainability of small and micro enterprises (Mat Zin & Engku Hassan Ashari, 2020; Soumena, 2024). Within socio-cultural studies, *muru'ah* is described as a moral and dignifying value shaping harmonious social relations, cultural expression, and character formation across communal and institutional settings (Ulfa & Nawawi, 2022). In Islamic legal scholarship, *muru'ah* functions as a principle that safeguards public welfare, informs moral evaluation and legal reasoning, and reinforces norms of proper conduct and accountability (Aravik et al., 2023; Sikki et al., 2025).

Despite the breadth of these discussions, studies that explicitly connect *muru'ah* to product innovation in the local snack-food sector remain scarce (Salleh et al., 2021). In fact, *muru'ah* as a reflection of ethical integrity, dignity, and proper conduct holds strategic potential in shaping innovation processes that prioritize halal raw materials, transparent and honest production practices, and product presentation that reflects courtesy and moral propriety (Alsmadi & Al Omoush, 2025). The limited empirical exploration of how this ethical value influences entrepreneurs to adopt improved production methods, develop creative product variations, or integrate Islamic ethical norms into innovation processes results in an incomplete understanding of the moral drivers behind innovative behavior within this industry (Rrofiah et al., 2023). Therefore, further research is urgently needed not only to fill this gap but also to strengthen the role of Islamic ethical values as motivational foundations for enhancing innovation capacity, consumer trust, and the sustainability of local halal-based snack-food enterprises (Ashraf, 2019; I. Ismail et al., 2025).

In examining the mediating role of *muru'ah* in fostering product innovation, this study draws on two theoretical foundations: Social Capital Theory and Open Innovation Theory. Social Capital Theory underscores the role of trust, norms, and social networks in forming productive relationships within business ecosystems (Do et al., 2025; Vu et al., 2023), while Open Innovation Theory emphasizes boundary-spanning collaboration and knowledge exchange as drivers of adaptive and market-responsive innovation (Aleksić et al., 2022;

Annamalah et al., 2025). Within this framework, muru'ah as a form of moral integrity acts as a mediating mechanism that strengthens social networks, cultivates trust, and facilitates collaborative processes, ultimately generating sustainable, ethically grounded, and socially relevant innovation outcomes (Yusfiarto et al., 2022).

This study addresses a gap in the literature that has not fully examined the mediating role of muru'ah in product innovation (Aravik et al., 2023; Yusfiarto et al., 2022). It investigates how muru'ah mediates the relationships among social networks, trust, and external collaboration. Social networks denote entrepreneurs' connectedness with communities and industry peers; trust reflects confidence in partners' honesty and reliability; and external collaboration involves cooperation with universities, government agencies, and halal organizations (Fauzi et al., 2024; Nasution et al., 2023). Muru'ah serves as a moral foundation directing these influences toward the development of innovative, competitive, ethical, and Islamic value oriented products (Muttaqin et al., 2023). Data from the Bone District Cooperative and MSME Office (2022) indicate about 13,000 active MSMEs, providing a relevant context. Thus, this study highlights the importance of integrating muru'ah into product innovation to enhance the quality, ethicality, and competitiveness of local MSMEs (Arum & Azzaki, 2024).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Foundation

Social Capital Theory explains that social networks, trust, and shared norms act as strategic resources that facilitate coordination, information exchange, and collective innovation (Do et al., 2025). Despite conceptual differences, Bourdieu, Coleman, and Putnam agree that social ties generate reciprocal benefits and strengthen cohesion within interaction-driven economies (Rossoni et al., 2024). In entrepreneurial settings, social capital expands access to knowledge, collaboration, and value creation (Latifah et al., 2022). When integrated with Islamic ethics particularly muru'ah it gains a normative layer emphasizing integrity and social responsibility (Al-Twal et al., 2024). Open Innovation Theory further highlights that innovation emerges through combined internal and external knowledge flows (Annamalah et al., 2023; Ouechtati et al., 2022), a model especially relevant for resource-limited MSMEs that rely on diverse stakeholders to develop superior products (Harinurdin et al., 2025). Embedding muru'ah into these processes ensures that collaboration remains transparent and ethical, producing innovations that are both competitive and morally grounded.

Muru'ah and Product Innovation

Muru'ah and product innovation form a mutually reinforcing relationship within Islamic value based business development. As a moral construct embodying dignity, ethical integrity, courtesy, and virtuous conduct, muru'ah serves as a personal ethic and a normative foundation for ethical and just business practices (Antonio, 2023; Aravik et al., 2023; Rangkuti, 2023). In product development, muru'ah shapes entrepreneurial behavior to engage in innovation

that is technically superior and carries ethical, spiritual, and social value. Entrepreneurs who uphold *murū'ah* avoid fraud, quality manipulation, unlawful ingredients, and practices that may harm consumers (Riani et al., 2025). Throughout the innovation process, *murū'ah* functions as a moral regulator grounded in honesty, responsibility, and propriety (Rangkuti, 2023). This is evident in the use of halal, high-quality raw materials and transparent, non-deceptive marketing strategies (Suwanto et al., 2025). Thus, *murū'ah* guides innovation toward public benefit, trust-building, and the strengthening of halal product identity (I. J. Ismail et al., 2025).

H1: *Murū'ah* exerts a significant influence on product innovation.

Participation in External Collaboration and *Murū'ah*

Participation in external collaboration reflects an individual's or organization's engagement with external partners such as business actors, educational institutions, or government agencies. Such collaboration broadens access to knowledge, technology, and new resources. However, its effectiveness is strongly shaped by the moral and ethical foundation underpinning interactions namely, *murū'ah*. Core values of *murū'ah*, including honesty, responsibility, and honor, provide the ethical framework necessary for fair, trustworthy, and accountable cooperation (Mappaterru & S, 2025). Entrepreneurs who embody *murū'ah* maintain commitments and avoid manipulative practices, resulting in external collaborations that are not only productive but also ethically grounded and sustainable (Soediro et al., 2024).

H2: Participation in external collaboration exerts a significant influence on *murū'ah*.

Social Networks and Participation in External Collaboration

Social networks represent structured relationships that emerge through interactions among individuals, groups, and organizations, serving as strategic channels that facilitate participation in external collaboration (Ul Zia et al., 2023). Within the framework of social capital, these networks function as conduits for information exchange and resource sharing, while simultaneously strengthening initial trust, legitimacy, and credibility in interorganizational settings. Strong and high-quality networks enable firms especially SMEs to access external knowledge, new technologies, market prospects, and strategic support that are often unattainable independently (Lyu et al., 2022; Sarto et al., 2020). The relationship between social networks and participation in external collaboration is mutually reinforcing, as robust networks encourage greater collaborative involvement, and successful collaboration further enhances the breadth and strength of these networks. Based on this reasoning, it can be hypothesized that.

H3: Social networks exert a significant influence on participation in external collaboration.

Trust and Participation in External Collaboration

Trust and participation in external collaboration share a reciprocal and reinforcing relationship in both social and business environments. Trust serves as a foundational mechanism that reduces perceived social and transactional risks, thereby enabling open, transparent, and goal-oriented cooperation among actors (Hwang et al., 2022). In turn, external collaboration represents an active form of engagement in cross-sector or interorganizational partnerships, whose effectiveness is inherently shaped by the level of trust built among stakeholders. When trust is high, entrepreneurs become more willing to share ideas, exchange strategic knowledge, and pursue joint innovation initiatives that require mutual dependence and cooperative effort (Kankam & Dza, 2025). Conversely, sustained collaborative participation promotes repeated interactions, fosters relational familiarity, and gradually strengthens deeper trust over time, creating a self-reinforcing cycle of cooperation and commitment.

H4: Trust exerts a significant influence on participation in external collaboration.

Muru'ah as Mediator

Muru'ah, as an ethical construct grounded in honor, integrity, and moral responsibility, provides a normative basis that shapes collaborative behavior and strengthens credibility and trust in professional exchanges (Su et al., 2021). In external collaboration, muru'ah acts as a moral framework that promotes openness, commitment, and accountability, thereby reducing conflict and improving the sustainability of partnerships (Duy et al., 2023; Mata et al., 2024). It also mediates the link between collaboration and product innovation by ensuring ethical and transparent knowledge exchange, which supports the development of competitive and socially responsible innovations. Conceptually, muru'ah reinforces the functional relationship between collaboration and innovation, consistent with social capital theory and the knowledge-based view (Do et al., 2025). Thus, muru'ah can be considered a strategic factor that enhances the effectiveness of external collaboration in driving high-quality product innovation.

H5: Muru'ah the relationship between Participation in External Collaboration and Product Innovation

Participation in External Collaboration as Mediator

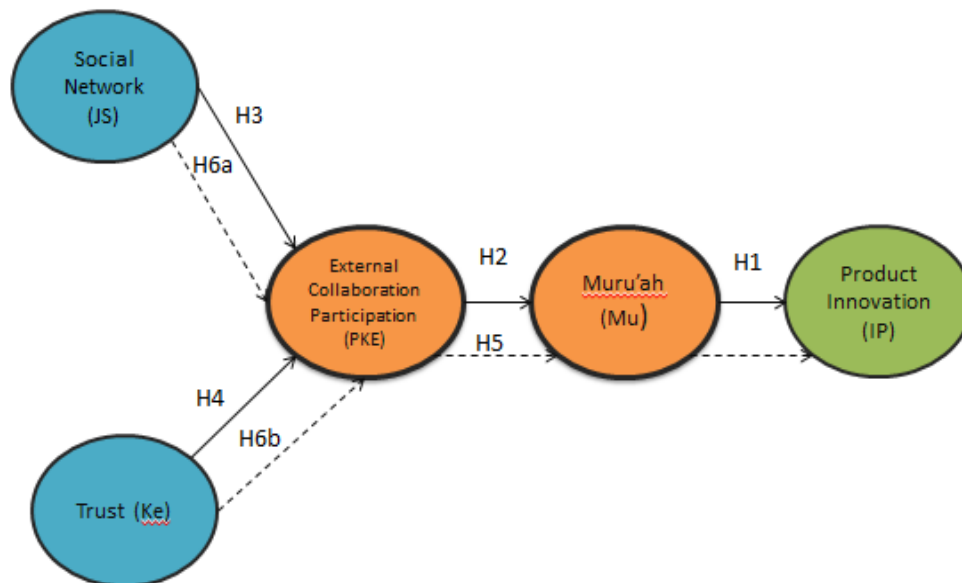
Participation in external collaboration serves as a key mediating mechanism that connects the influence of social networks and trust to the development of muru'ah, as active engagement in inter-organizational cooperation creates opportunities for transparent, ethical, and mutually oriented interactions in which actors can demonstrate integrity, responsibility, and moral commitment (Bakalo & Bogale, 2024; Nezami et al., 2023). This collaborative involvement strengthens the relational value of social networks by providing a concrete arena where moral principles can be enacted and reinforced through practice. At the same time, participation in external collaboration mediates the effect of trust on

murū'ah, since trust evolves into a deeper moral quality when tested through repeated interactions, shared tasks, and the need for consistent ethical behaviour (Szaller et al., 2024). Through these processes, external collaboration transforms social and relational resources into tangible expressions of moral character.

H6: Participation in External Collaboration in the relationship between: (a) Social Networks and Muru'ah, and (b) Trust and Muru'ah.

III. METODE PENELITIAN

This study adopts a quantitative explanatory research design aimed at empirically examining the causal relationships among Social Networks, Trust, Participation in External Collaboration, Muru'ah, and Product Innovation among local MSME snack entrepreneurs in Bone Regency. The explanatory approach is employed to identify the direction and strength of influence from exogenous variables to endogenous variables while assessing the mediating role of muru'ah in channeling the effects of social factors toward the development of ethical and value-based product innovation. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), a method appropriate for predictive research involving complex structural models, numerous parameters, and relatively small sample sizes.



Source: The authors' own work, 2025

Figure 1. The analytical model of study

The analytical model illustrates the structural relationships among the study's constructs, wherein product innovation (IP) is shaped by muru'ah (Mu), while muru'ah (Mu) itself is influenced by social networks (JS), trust (Ke), and participation in external collaboration (PKE). Positioned as a moral foundation, muru'ah (Mu) functions as a mediating mechanism that transforms the quality of

social relationships into innovative behavior that is ethical, responsible, and welfare-oriented. From the perspective of Islamic economics, *muru'ah* (Mu) represents attributes of integrity, decorum, trustworthiness, honesty, and moral discipline that strengthen the innovation process by aligning professional conduct with spiritual and ethical values.

The research instrument consists of a structured questionnaire divided into two main sections. The first section outlines the purpose of the study and collects demographic information, including age, education level, employment status, and business duration. The second section comprises 15 indicator statements measuring the five core constructs using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). These constructs include Social Networks (3 items), Trust (3 items), Participation in External Collaboration (3 items), *Muru'ah* (3 items), and Product Innovation (3 items), each developed based on the conceptual and operational definitions previously established.

Data collection was conducted over a three-month period, from February to April 2025, using an online survey administered via Google Forms. A cluster sampling technique was applied based on administrative regions, covering five districts in Bone Regency: Tanete Riattang, Tanete Riattang Barat, Tanete Riattang Timur, Palakka, and Awangpone. These locations were selected to capture variations in social, economic, and business characteristics that reflect the dynamics of social networks and moral values among MSME actors. A total of 153 MSME respondents participated in the study, determined using an Observation-to-Parameter (N:p) ratio of 10:1, as recommended by (Hair & Alamer, 2022; Ringle et al., 2023), thereby meeting the minimum sample size requirement for PLS-SEM analysis.

Data were analyzed using SmartPLS version 4.0.8.9 (Ringle et al., 2022) through two major stages. The first stage involved the Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model), which assessed convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability using factor loadings, Composite Reliability, Cronbach's Alpha, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Chawla & Joshi, 2019). The second stage involved the Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model), which tested the hypotheses by examining R-Square values, F-Square effect sizes, and path coefficients, with statistical significance set at $p < 0.05$ (Richter & Tudoran, 2024).

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The majority of the 153 respondents were female (69.30%), aged 18–23 years (81%), unmarried (86.90%), and held a senior high school or equivalent education (74.50%). Most respondents were students (61.40%) with low or unstable income levels. This demographic profile reflects a predominance of young individuals with limited financial stability, providing a relevant representation for analyzing their consumption behaviors.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Criteria/Category		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	47	30,70%
	Female	106	69,30%
Agei	18–23years	124	81%
	24–29 years	16	10,50%
	30–35 years	7	4,60%
	36–41 years	3	2%
	42-47 years	3	2%
Marital Status	Married	133	86,90%
	Unmarried	20	13,10%
Educational Background			
	Senior High School or equivalent	114	74,50%
	Diploma	27	17,60%
	Bachelor's Degree (S1)	6	3,90%
	Master's Degree (S2)	3	2%
	Others	3	2%
Occupation	Student	94	61,40%
	Entrepreneur/Trader	16	10,50%
	Others	34	22,20%
	Lecturer/Teacher	0	0%
	Military/Police	0	0%
	Government/Private	0	0%
	Employee	0	0%
Monthly Income	Below IDR 1 million	74	48,40%
	IDR 1 million – IDR 5 million	35	22,90%
	IDR 5 million – IDR 7 million	30	19,60%
	IDR 7 million – IDR 10 million	5	3,30%
	Above IDR 10 million	2	1,30%
	Below IDR 1 million	7	4,60%

Source: Primary data processed in 2025.

Measurement Model Assessment

Table 2 shows that all constructs met the criteria for convergent validity and reliability, with Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.86 and Composite Reliability exceeding 0.91. The AVE values, ranging from 0.792 to 0.856, were well above the 0.50 benchmark, indicating strong indicator explanatory power for each construct. Thus, all variables were confirmed as valid and reliable for further structural model analysis.

Table 2. Validity and Reliability Test Results

Variables	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Access to Capital Resources (ACR)	0.868	0.869	0.919	0.792
Product Competitiveness (PC)	0.890	0.896	0.932	0.820
Itqan (IT)	0.892	0.892	0.933	0.823
Community Empowerment (CE)	0.907	0.908	0.942	0.843
Changes in Entrepreneurial Attitudes and Knowledge (CEAK)	0.916	0.916	0.947	0.856

Source: Primary data processed by using SmartPLS 4, 2025.

Table 3 shows that all indicators exhibit outer loading values well above the 0.70 threshold, confirming the achievement of convergent validity. Indicators such as IP2 (0.972), JS2 (0.958), Ke2 (0.973), Mu2 (0.980), and PKE2 (0.967) demonstrate exceptionally strong contributions to their respective constructs. These results indicate that the measurement instrument possesses excellent reliability and measurement precision.

Table 3. Outer Loadings

Variables	Product Innovation	Social Network	Trust	Muru'ah	External Collaboration Participation
IP1	0.967				
IP2	0.972				
IP3	0.962				
JS1		0.953			
JS2		0.958			
JS3		0.928			
Ke1			0.957		
Ke2			0.973		
Ke3			0.927		
Mu1				0.967	
Mu2				0.980	
Mu3				0.967	
PKE1					0.945
PKE2					0.967
PKE3					0.950

Source: Primary data processed by using SmartPLS 4, 2025

Table 4. Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Variables	IP	JS	Ke	Mu	PKE
Product Innovation	0.967				
Social Network	0.849	0.946			
Trust	0.851	0.861	0.952		
<i>Muru'ah</i>	0.834	0.736	0.823	0.971	
External Collaboration Participation	0.878	0.830	0.872	0.8400.853	0.954

Source: Primary data processed by using SmartPLS 4, 2025

Table 4 indicates that all constructs satisfy the Fornell–Larcker criterion, as the square root of the AVE on the diagonal exceeds the inter-construct correlations. This demonstrates that each variable is more strongly associated with its own indicators than with other constructs, thereby confirming adequate discriminant validity. The results further imply that each construct stands independently without conceptual overlap.

Table 5 reports substantial R^2 values for Product Innovation (0.696), *Muru'ah* (0.727), and External Collaboration Participation (0.785), reflecting strong predictive power within the structural model. The stability of the adjusted R^2 values corroborates the absence of overfitting and indicates consistent relationships among variables. Overall, these findings affirm that the model exhibits excellent explanatory accuracy for the key latent constructs.

Table 5. R-Square and Adjusted R-Square Values

Variables	R-square	R-square adjusted
Product Innovation	0.696	0.694
<i>Muru'ah</i>	0.727	0.774 0.726
External Collaboration Participation	0.785	0.775 0.782

Source: Primary data processed by using SmartPLS 4, 2025

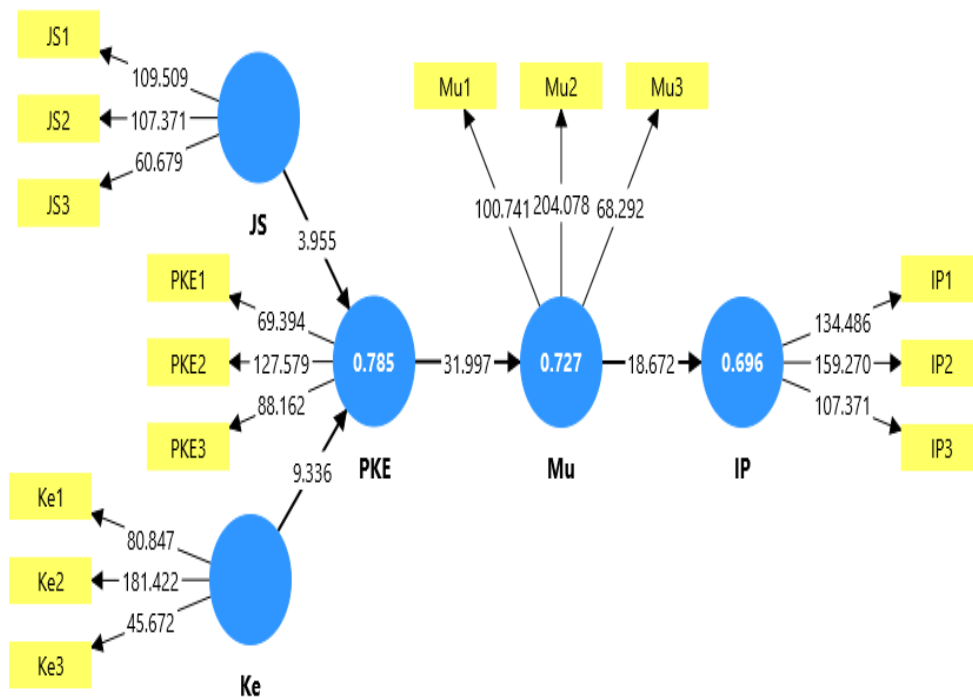
Table 6 shows that *Muru'ah* ($f^2 = 2.292$) and External Collaboration Participation ($f^2 = 2.670$) exert very large effect sizes within the model. In contrast, Social Network demonstrates a small effect ($f^2 = 0.114$), while Trust exhibits a medium effect ($f^2 = 0.445$). Collectively, these findings indicate that the primary constructs play a dominant role in explaining the variance of the endogenous variables.

Table 6. F-Square Values

Variables	PI	JS	Ke	Mu	PKE
Product Innovation					
Social Network					0.114
Trust					0.445
<i>Muru'ah</i>	2.292				
External Collaboration Participation				2.670	

Source: Primary data processed by using SmartPLS 4, 2025

Structural Model Assessment



Source: Primary data processed by using SmartPLS 4, 2025.

Figure 2. Output of the structural model testing

Table 7 demonstrates that all structural relationships are statistically significant, with Social Network and Trust exerting strong influences on External Collaboration Participation. *Muru'ah* shows a substantial effect on Product Innovation, while external collaboration markedly enhances *Muru'ah*. Overall, social networking, trust, collaborative engagement, and moral values emerge as critical determinants shaping innovative behavior among MSMEs.

Table 7. SEM-PLS: Direct Effect Testing Results

	Relationship of Variables	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
H1	Muru'ah → Product Innovation	0.834	0.831	0.045	18.672	0
H2	External Collaboration Participation → Muru'ah (MU)	0.853	0.855	0.027	31.997	0
H3	Social Network → External Collaboration Participation	0.307	0.309	0.078	3.955	0
H4	Trust → External Collaboration Participation	0.607	0.61	0.065	9.336	0

Source: Primary data processed by using SmartPLS 4, 2025

Table 8. SEM-PLS: Indirect Effect Testing Results

	Relationship of Variables	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
H5	External Collaboration Participation → Muru'ah → Product Innovation	0.712	0.711	0.052	13.606	0
H6a	Social Network → External Collaboration Participation → Muru'ah	0.262	0.264	0.066	3.974	0
H6b	Trust → External Collaboration Participation → Muru'ah	0.518	0.522	0.057	9.092	0

Source: Primary data processed by using SmartPLS 4, 2025

Table 8 further reveals three significant mediation pathways, indicating that external collaboration through its strengthening effect on *Muru'ah* produces a very strong impact on innovation ($\beta = 0.712$). Both Social Network and Trust influence innovation indirectly through External Collaboration Participation, which subsequently enhances *Muru'ah*. Collectively, these results highlight external collaboration and *Muru'ah* as key mediating mechanisms linking social relations and trust to MSME innovation.

The mediation analysis demonstrates that External Collaboration Participation and *Muru'ah* function as full mediators in shaping product innovation among micro and small enterprises. The indirect effects reveal that Social Networks and Trust exert no significant direct influence on innovation; instead, their effects operate exclusively through collaborative engagement and the internalization of ethical character. These findings indicate that external social capital must first be converted into substantive collaborative involvement and subsequently internalized as moral integrity before it can drive innovative outcomes. External Collaboration Participation acts as a catalytic mechanism that channels access to resources, information flows, and cross-actor capabilities, whereas *Muru'ah* serves as a transformational ethical filter that directs these inputs into responsible and value-oriented innovative behavior. Overall, the model provides clear evidence of a full mediation effect, underscoring that sustainable product innovation is driven not merely by social exposure or trust, but by the integration of collaborative practices and deeply internalized ethical values.

Discussion

Within the epistemological framework of Islamic business ethics and Social Capital Theory, the dynamics linking social networks, trust, external collaboration, and *muru'ah* among micro-entrepreneurs can be understood as a structured behavioral system rather than a spontaneous interactional pattern (Yusfiarto et al., 2022). Social networks ($\beta = 0.684$; $p < 0.001$) and trust ($\beta = 0.703$; $p < 0.001$) significantly shape external collaborative engagement, demonstrating that relational structures and moral assurances form the cognitive-affective base from which ethical business behavior emerges. These findings validate Coleman's assertion that social capital strengthens cooperative behavior and resonate with Islamic normative principles emphasizing *ṣidq*, *amānah*, and *ta'āwun* as essential precursors for ethical economic action. Thus, collaboration among entrepreneurs is not merely transactional but grounded in moral commitments embedded in their social relations (Subchi et al., 2024).

Muru'ah functions as a critical internal mediator translating collaborative participation into innovative business practices. External collaboration exerts a strong effect on *muru'ah* ($\beta = 0.712$; $p < 0.001$), while *muru'ah* significantly enhances product innovation ($\beta = 0.691$; $p < 0.001$) (Lu et al., 2024). This mediating mechanism aligns with classical mediation theory, where value internalization converts social-relational stimuli into behavioral outputs (Xu et al., 2024). *Muru'ah* represents not only an ethical identity but an epistemic filter that ensures entrepreneurial conduct remains aligned with Islamic virtues including integrity, honor, and moral accountability. Through this pathway, collaborative

activities do not directly produce innovation; rather, they cultivate moral refinement that subsequently inspires creativity rooted in ethical discipline.

Information flow within social networks and trust-based interactions further illustrates the cognitive moral integration shaping entrepreneurial decision-making. Strong networks facilitate the circulation of knowledge, technical insights, and market intelligence, but these informational benefits become behaviorally meaningful only when filtered through *murū'ah* as a moral evaluator (Riaz et al., 2024). Similarly, trust strengthens willingness to share resources and reduce relational uncertainty (Kacperska & Łukasiewicz, 2020), yet its influence on innovation is indirect operating through ethical consciousness formed during collaborative engagements. This interplay between rational assessment and moral internalization affirms that entrepreneurial innovation in Islamic contexts embodies both pragmatic rationality and virtue-based reasoning.

Normative and communal expectations reinforce this mediational structure. Participation in collaborative networks embeds entrepreneurs within moral communities where shared values, collective norms, and reputational pressures shape individual behavior. Social Identity Theory explains that alignment with group expectations strengthens internalization of *murū'ah*, resulting in innovation practices that reflect not merely efficiency but also communal legitimacy (Liu et al., 2022). For Muslim entrepreneurs, innovative outputs such as improvements in product quality, hygiene, safety, and authenticity thus arise from the convergence of social capital, ethical identity, and cultural expectations that elevate honor-driven business conduct (Do et al., 2025).

Overall, the findings demonstrate that innovation among local entrepreneurs is a multidimensional construct emerging from the integrated interaction of social structures, moral values, and collaborative mechanisms (Games et al., 2023). Strengthening entrepreneurial innovation therefore requires strategic interventions that reinforce trust-building, expand social networking platforms, and cultivate ethical consciousness through value-based training grounded in Islamic virtues (Jirawuttinunt & Wongsahai, 2021). By embedding moral character (*murū'ah*) at the core of entrepreneurial ecosystems, policymakers and practitioners can promote sustainable innovation that is not only competitive but also socially responsible and spiritually aligned with Islamic ethical frameworks.

V. CONCLUSION

The present synthesis demonstrates that social networks and trust function as pivotal relational assets that substantially enhance external collaboration among micro and small enterprises. The empirical evidence from prior studies consistently shows that network embeddedness improves access to strategic information, strengthens cooperative behavior, and facilitates knowledge exchange, while trust serves as a stabilizing mechanism that reduces transactional uncertainties and reinforces collaborative commitment. Within this relational ecosystem, *murū'ah* as a moral-ethical construct grounded in Islamic business ethics operates as an internal capability promoting responsible conduct, reputational integrity, and innovation-oriented behavior. The convergence of

relational and ethical dimensions underscores that innovative performance is not solely determined by technical competencies but emerges from the dynamic interplay between moral values and collaborative structures.

Building on these findings, this research recommends that micro-enterprises intensify participation in structured external collaborations, including inter-firm partnerships, community-based networks, and supply-chain alliances that enable continuous knowledge transfer. Strengthening institutional trust both interpersonal and inter-organizational should also be prioritized through transparent communication, consistent ethical conduct, and formalized cooperation mechanisms. In addition, the cultivation of muru'ah as an organizational capability is imperative; enterprises should embed ethical values within operational routines, leadership practices, and decision-making frameworks to create an enabling environment for sustainable innovation. Policymakers and development agencies may further support these efforts by facilitating capacity-building programs, providing networking platforms, and integrating ethical-cultural dimensions into entrepreneurship development frameworks.

Despite its contributions, this synthesis acknowledges several limitations. First, the generalizability of the findings remains constrained by contextual variations in local culture, institutional environments, and sectoral characteristics, which may influence the manifestation of social capital and ethical values such as muru'ah. Second, much of the existing empirical evidence relies on cross-sectional designs, limiting causal inference regarding the dynamic interactions among networks, trust, collaboration, and innovation. Third, the operationalization of muru'ah as an empirical construct remains underdeveloped across the literature, indicating the need for more rigorous measurements and longitudinal studies. Future research should address these limitations by employing multi-method approaches, comparative cross-regional analyses, and advanced modeling techniques to deepen theoretical and empirical understanding of how relational structures and ethical values jointly shape innovation outcomes.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

S.N. designed the research framework, developed the methodology, and conducted the data collection. S.R. supervised the overall study, contributed to the theoretical strengthening, and refined the data analysis and interpretation. J. assisted in the literature review, manuscript editing, and ensured clarity and consistency throughout the paper. All authors (S.N., S.R., and J.) read, reviewed, and approved the final version of this manuscript.

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INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

Written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in the study.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data supporting the findings of this study are available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author [S.N.].

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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Appendix

Tabel: Questionnaire

No.	Variable	Measurements	Scale (Likert)
1	Social Network (JS)	1. I maintain an extensive network of collaborations with external parties, such as suppliers, customers, and other institutions. 2. I regularly interact and engage in discussions with business partners, customers, or community groups to support business development. 3. I perceive tangible benefits from my social networks in supporting the growth of my business.	1 – 5
2	Trust (Ke)	4. I believe that my business partners are honest and uphold their commitments in collaborative activities. 5. I believe that my business partners possess adequate capabilities and expertise in fulfilling their roles. 6. I feel secure sharing information, ideas, and experiences with my business partners.	1 – 5
3	Participation in	7. I am actively involved in collaborative	1 – 5

	External Collaboration (PKE)	activities with external parties to support the development of my business.	
		8. I actively contribute ideas, time, or resources in every form of business collaboration in which I participate.	
		9. I am committed to maintaining long-term collaborative relationships with my business partners.	
4	Product Innovation (IP)	10. I actively create local snack products to meet market needs.	1 – 5
		11. I consistently improve the quality of local snack products to meet consumer expectations.	
		12. I quickly adapt my local snack products to changing market needs and trends.	
5	<i>Muru'ah (Mu)</i>	13. I run my business based on the principles of honesty, responsibility, and fairness.	1 - 5
		14. I respect the rights, opinions, and dignity of all parties involved in my business.	
		15. I strive to serve as a role model in conducting business by upholding ethical values, honesty, and responsibility.	