

Strengthening the global competitiveness of halal culinary SMEs in North Sumatra through a Maqasid of Shariah-based approach

Ismail¹ , Azhari Akmal Tarigan² , Andri Soemitra² , & Zuhrinal M. Nawawi³ 

¹Program Studi Ekonomi Syari'ah (S1), Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Kota Medan, Indonesia

²Program Studi Ekonomi Syariah (S3), Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Kota Medan, Indonesia

³Program Studi Perbankan Syariah (S2), Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Kota Medan, Indonesia

ABSTRAK

Introduction

The global halal food industry, projected to reach USD 2.4 trillion by 2024, presents a substantial opportunity for regional economies such as North Sumatra. Despite the region's rich culinary heritage, the development of its halal culinary industry faces critical challenges, including limited access to halal certification, low levels of product innovation, and inadequate adoption of digital marketing strategies. These limitations hinder the competitiveness of local small and medium enterprises in the creative economy sector.

Objectives

This study aims to formulate a strategic development model for North Sumatra's halal culinary industry using a values-based approach grounded in Islamic economic principles. It specifically integrates the Maqasid of Shariah framework as a benchmark for ethical and sustainable development.

Method

The research employed a qualitative methodology through in-depth interviews with ten key stakeholders, including halal culinary entrepreneurs, government agencies, academics, and religious institutions. Data were analyzed using Atlas.ti version 9 to identify key development issues, which were then evaluated using the Maqasid of Shariah Index. The model assessed three main dimensions: Tahdzib Al-Fard (individual education), Iqomat Al-Adl (justice), and Maslahah (public welfare).

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Azhari Akmal Tarigan, Andri Soemitra, & Zuhrinal M. Nawawi. Licensee Universitas Islam Indonesia, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

Contact: Ismail ✉ ismail@fai.uisu.ac.id

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Results

Findings identified digital marketing, product development, capital access, and halal certification as top strategic priorities. The Maqasid of Shariah Index score reached 67.90%, categorized as “Fairly Good.” Among the dimensions, individual development scored the highest, followed by justice and public welfare. This highlights the significance of capacity building and ethical governance in improving the industry's competitiveness.

Implications

The integration of qualitative analysis with the Maqasid of Shariah Index provides a structured and ethical framework for policy-makers and business actors. The findings offer practical guidance for implementing strategies that are both economically viable and religiously aligned, enabling inclusive and sustainable growth in the halal culinary sector.

Originality/Novelty

This study introduces an innovative model by combining a qualitative data analysis tool with a syariah-based evaluative index, a method rarely applied in the development of creative halal industries. It offers new insights into ethically grounded strategic planning for regional halal economic development.

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INTRODUCTION

In the era of global economic transformation, the halal culinary industry has gained significant attention as a strategic component of the creative economy. Driven by a growing Muslim population and increasing awareness among non-Muslim consumers, the global halal market is projected to reach USD 2.4 trillion by 2024 (Hassan & Fernando, 2025). Countries like Indonesia, with a majority-Muslim population and rich culinary heritage, are uniquely positioned to capitalize on this trend. North Sumatra, in particular, offers diverse traditional cuisines that align with halal principles. Yet, this potential remains underutilized. As Ab Talib & Zulfakar (2024) argue, the successful development of halal-based economies depends not only on demand but also on structural preparedness and ethical business frameworks that reflect both cultural values and market competitiveness.

Recent literature has highlighted the significance of integrating technology and ethical governance into halal food systems. Studies by Raimi et al. (2025), Salaheldeen & Battour (2024), and Irfany et al. (2025) emphasize the need for innovation, digital marketing, and sustainability in halal enterprises. However, the scholarly discourse often remains confined within technical or operational parameters, neglecting the deeper ethical dimensions rooted in Islamic economic philosophy. While Qalbia &



Saputra (2023) have explored the promise of digitalization, and Rahman & Zainuddin (2024) discuss its implications for sharia-based marketing, relatively few have addressed how these strategies can be aligned with the principles of justice (*adl*) and public welfare (*maslahah*). Thus, a more holistic and values-based approach is needed to bridge this divide.

Despite the vast economic promise, small and medium-sized halal culinary enterprises (*industri kecil menengah bidang kuliner* or IKM Sektor Kuliner) in North Sumatra face structural and operational barriers. These include limited access to halal certification, inadequate use of digital technologies, low innovation capacity, and weak institutional support. According to Syukur et al. (2024) and Yakup et al. (2024), these bottlenecks restrict market access and stifle enterprise growth, limiting their contribution to regional economic development. Furthermore, the uneven distribution of resources and lack of inclusive policies exacerbate inequality in entrepreneurial ecosystems. While strategies such as digital branding and skill development are widely proposed, they often overlook the normative framework that ensures equitable and sustainable business practices.

Common responses to these challenges have focused on accelerating certification procedures, improving market access, and increasing digital literacy. For instance, Safina et al. (2024) argue that Islamic economic education plays a vital role in empowering halal entrepreneurs, while Oktavio et al. (2024) underscore the need for long-term policy interventions. Yet, these efforts frequently fall short of addressing the deeper institutional and ethical concerns voiced by stakeholders. As Mohammed & Md Taib (2025) note in the context of Islamic banking, policy success depends not only on technical efficacy but also on alignment with the foundational goals of sharia—namely, safeguarding faith, life, intellect, progeny, and wealth. The same logic should apply to halal industry development, yet few models integrate this dimension systematically.

Scholars have begun to recognize the relevance of *Maqasid Syariah* as a framework for evaluating non-financial sectors. Nasik et al. (2024) and Islam et al. (2024) suggest that embedding *Maqasid Syariah* into halal enterprise evaluation can foster a more equitable and sustainable system. These studies adapt Abu Zahrah's (1956) triadic framework—*Tahdzib al-Fard* (individual education), *Iqomat al-Adl* (justice), and *Maslahah* (public welfare)—to guide ethical entrepreneurship and policy formulation. Yet, many existing works apply these concepts normatively rather than analytically. The challenge remains: how can these principles be operationalized through measurable indicators and practical tools to inform policy and strategy for halal culinary SMEs?

Addressing this gap, recent research by Mohammed & Md Taib (2025) and Antonio et al. (2012) has advanced the *Maqasid Shariah Index* (MSI) as a tool for performance assessment in Islamic banking. These efforts lay the groundwork for broader applications. Integrating MSI with qualitative analysis methods such as Atlas.ti offers a promising hybrid model. Atlas.ti enables in-depth coding of stakeholder insights, while MSI provides a normative benchmark for value-based evaluation. Studies by Mansur (2023) and Perdana et al. (2023) show how qualitative tools can be adapted to explore

complex, value-laden business ecosystems. When these tools are combined, they offer a multi-dimensional perspective—empirical, interpretive, and ethical—on how halal enterprises function and evolve.

Nonetheless, few empirical studies have merged these two methodological streams to guide policy for halal industry development. While Aysan & Syarif (2025) explore metaverse tools for halal tourism, and Kusumaningtyas & Latifah (2024) propose techno-sociopreneurship models, neither approach systematically applies *Maqasid Syariah* as an evaluative lens. This creates a research gap that there is insufficient literature on the integrative use of Atlas.ti and MSI to identify actionable strategies for halal SMEs, especially within the regional and culturally specific context of North Sumatra. This study aims to fill that void by building a composite model that accounts for structural constraints, stakeholder perspectives, and Islamic ethical values.

Therefore, this research seeks to design a development strategy for halal culinary SMEs in North Sumatra by integrating *Maqasid Syariah Index* with qualitative analysis from Atlas.ti. The novelty lies in adapting a framework typically used in Islamic finance to assess the creative economy, offering both theoretical and practical value. The study also contributes to policy innovation by aligning enterprise development with Islamic ethics, providing a template for stakeholders to formulate context-sensitive, justice-oriented strategies. With its methodological blend and normative foundation, the research offers a scalable model for enhancing competitiveness and ethical integrity in halal-based industries.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Maqasid Shariah Applications beyond Banking

Early applications of the Maqasid Shariah Index focused on Islamic banking, yet recent scholarship shows a decisive shift toward creative-economy fields. Previous studies (Bhuiyan et al., 2012; Kunjuran, 2022; F. Musa et al., 2020) framed eco-tourism financing in Malaysia as a vehicle for environmental stewardship and local welfare, demonstrating that coastal conservation can satisfy the maqāṣid of resource protection and equitable prosperity. Parallel work in Indonesia by Akmal et al. (2021) positioned halal-tourism packages as engines of community income, while Savira et al. (2024) used the framework to evaluate coastal-empowerment projects that merge social justice with habitat preservation. Collectively, these studies confirm that Maqasid logic is portable, provided that sector-specific indicators replace purely financial ratios.

Methodological refinements accompany this sectoral migration. Rusydiana & Ali (2022) call for qualitative metrics—stakeholder satisfaction, ecological integrity, and cultural vitality—to balance quantitative scores, whereas Uula & Harahap (2023) advocate participatory weighting so local actors decide what “success” means in their own dialects. Mukhlisin (2020) extends the argument by proposing multi-dimensional dashboards that test governance, social impact, and profitability simultaneously. Longitudinal tracking is also gaining traction as many findings (Chan, 2018; Mazenda &



Cheteni, 2021; Schmitt, 2016) recommend multi-year panels to capture slow-moving welfare effects. These adaptations widen the index's descriptive power and align it with heterogenous creative-economy realities where value is expressed in trust, authenticity, and place-making rather than interest margins.

Digital Marketing and Halal-Culinary Competitiveness

Digital marketing dominates recent halal-culinary research because algorithmic visibility increasingly governs market entry. Antara et al. (2023) find that influencer tie-ins boost Indonesian halal-snack sales by up to twenty-five percent within six months, while Azmi et al. (2018) show that story-driven Instagram content improves niche targeting and conversion rates. Omnichannel dashboards matter too as Kamarulzaman et al. (2021) report that integrated analytics cut customer-acquisition costs in half by unifying data flows, and Azzumi et al. link cross-platform performance tracking to superior return on promotional investment. Enhanced social-media content thus operates as both a revenue accelerator and a reputational asset in halal markets where authenticity cues signal religious compliance.

Quantitative studies reinforce these patterns across Southeast Asia. Adetunji et al. (2019) document that hedonic and functional brand images, conveyed through high-resolution visuals, mediate the path from advertising spend to actual sales, whereas Schivinski & Dąbrowski (2015) demonstrate that strong brand communities lower acquisition costs via repeat purchasing. Sari et al. add an export dimension, showing that omnichannel presence sharpens international readiness by feeding granular consumer insights into product adaptation cycles. Hamid et al. (2022) and Musa et al. (2022) confirm that influencer partnerships raise brand credibility, reduce trust deficits, and, by extension, unlock new geographic markets. Together these findings situate digital marketing at the intersection of economic growth and Maqasid-defined welfare.

Governance Innovations in Halal Certification

Administrative friction remains a formidable barrier for halal-culinary MSMEs, yet comparative policy research offers actionable remedies. Hidayati's (2024) evaluation of Indonesia's SEHATI programme shows that fee waivers materially expand certification uptake among micro-enterprises without eroding compliance rigor. In Malaysia's meat sector, Daud et al. (2023) trace a positive correlation between fee-waiver adoption and the number of certified firms. Abdulraof's (2024) cross-country review attributes Malaysia's shorter lead times to an e-certification portal that automates document checks and flags inconsistencies instantly, while Talib et al. (2016) propose integrated facilitation hubs that couple technical coaching with logistics advice. These tools collectively compress costs and timelines, sharpening the *'adl* and *maslahah* dimensions of Maqasid performance.

Success depends on institutional scaffolding. The evidence emphasises strong government sponsorship, transparent fee schedules, and open-source digital platforms that third-party auditors can verify. Technology adoption not only expedites

processing but also creates immutable audit trails, satisfying consumer demand for traceability. Where public–private partnerships have been piloted, shared dashboards distribute compliance knowledge outward, preventing informational monopolies and fostering communal learning. Consequently, certification reform—once viewed as a bureaucratic chore—emerges as a strategic lever that boosts both competitiveness and collective welfare, reinforcing the ethical symmetry at the heart of the Maqasid framework.

Blended Islamic Micro-Finance for Capital Access

Capital scarcity can be critical point for micro, small, and medium enterprises development, and literature on blended Islamic micro-finance suggests viable paths forward. Aderemi & Ishak (2020) illustrate how *qard al-ḥasan* loans reduce borrower stress and free cash for inventory replenishment, while Shikur & Akkaş (2024) link combined *qard-muḍārabah* packages to measurable poverty reduction in Ethiopia. Kholidah et al. (2024) extend the model by integrating fintech layers that automate contract management and lower screening costs, broadening outreach. Harahap et al. conclude that financial literacy programs are essential complements, ensuring that entrepreneurs understand repayment disciplines and profit-sharing mechanics. Welfare gains occur when finance is both affordable and intelligible.

Key success factors coalesce around community engagement and institutional trust. Studies emphasise mutual-assistance norms (*ta'āwun*) and social collateral to curb default risk, while donor-backed originations help de-risk early portfolios. Technological add-ons—mobile wallets, digital signatures, AI-driven credit scoring—further streamline disbursement and monitoring. When these design choices align, micro-finance transcends short-term liquidity support and evolves into a systemic intervention that elevates *jalb al-maṣlaḥah* through job creation and *iqāmat al-'adl* via equitable access. For halal-culinary MSMEs navigating thin margins, such instruments can finance certification fees, packaging upgrades, and e-commerce onboarding in a Sharia-compliant manner.

Qualitative Rigor with Atlas.ti in Halal-Industry Studies

The credibility of qualitative insights hinges on methodological discipline, and recent halal-sector scholarship documents best practices when using Atlas.ti. Islam et al. (2023) employ stakeholder theory to map certification complexities, demonstrating that a detailed codebook and pilot coding can surface inter-jurisdictional discrepancies. Wannasupchue et al. (2021) show how iterative coding with restaurant owners uncovers fine-grained licensing barriers, while Fauzi et al. (2024) visualise theme clusters to explain certification success in Malaysian SMEs. Across these studies, inter-coder reliability above 0.80 is achieved through rigorous coder training and reconciliation sessions, validating the robustness of thematic claims.

Audit-trail transparency and thematic saturation further anchor analytical quality. Soltani et al. (2023) recommend documenting every coding decision; Annisa (2023) and Prayuda et al. (2023) highlight diverse sampling and continuous analysis to ensure



no new themes emerge undetected. These protocols create replicable pathways that future researchers can inspect, thereby elevating the epistemic status of qualitative evidence. Given North Sumatra's reliance on rich interview data, integrating such safeguards fortifies the link between grounded codes, Atlas.ti network maps, and the normative weightings later applied in the Maqasid Syariah Index.

Research Gap and the Significance of the Study

Although the literature robustly addresses digital marketing, certification reform, micro-finance, and methodological rigor, few studies weave these threads into a single performance dashboard calibrated to Maqasid priorities. Existing indexes often treat ethical and competitive variables separately, obscuring the trade-offs policymakers face. Likewise, interventions are typically evaluated in isolation—digital upgrades or loan schemes—without testing their combined effect on composite welfare metrics. By integrating Atlas.ti-derived salience measures with a customized Maqasid index, the present study offers a holistic diagnostic that links day-to-day operational levers to overarching spiritual and social objectives, filling a critical analytical void.

This integration is significant for both theory and practice. Theoretically, it extends Maqasid operationalisation into creative-economy terrains, demonstrating that multi-dimensional welfare can be quantified outside financial institutions. Practically, the framework equips governments and entrepreneurs with a road-map that sequences digital, financial, and regulatory reforms by their expected contribution to welfare, justice, and personal development. Because the model is data-agnostic, other Muslim-majority regions can adapt it to handicrafts, agro-processing, or halal tourism, enhancing external validity and enriching the global conversation on ethically grounded competitiveness.

METHOD

Research Design

The study employed an interpretivist, multiple-case qualitative design to illuminate how halal-culinary micro- and small-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in North Sumatra formulate development strategies when assessed against Maqasid Syariah. Qualitative inquiry was preferred because it reveals the tacit meanings, value conflicts, and institutional frictions that quantitative surveys often obscure ([Mansur, 2023](#); [Perdana et al., 2023](#)). The design positions each interviewed stakeholder—owners, regulators, and scholars—as an embedded unit of analysis within a single regional case, enabling cross-stakeholder comparison while preserving contextual depth. This architecture also aligns with previous halal-value-chain studies that recommend exploratory, theory-building approaches before large-scale measurement ([Gulsia & Yadav, 2023](#)).

Participant Selection and Context

Purposive criterion sampling secured ten informants representing the ecosystem's critical nodes: four MSME owners, five provincial officials from industry, cooperatives, tourism-creative-economy, and the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), plus one

Islamic-economics academic. Inclusion required direct decision-making authority over halal-culinary operations or policy. Both urban (Medan) and peri-urban districts (Langkat, Deli Serdang, Serdang Bedagai) were covered to capture supply-chain variance. Prior to contact, the research team obtained ethical clearance from the university's Human Research Ethics Committee and secured written consent, emphasizing voluntary participation and the right to withdraw without prejudice. Demographic and organizational profiles were logged to support transferability assessments across comparable Southeast-Asian halal clusters.

Data-Collection Procedures

Data collection unfolded in two sequential phases between January and March 2024. Phase I mapped the regional halal-culinary value chain through documentary analysis of provincial policy papers and certification guidelines, producing an interview guide anchored in supply-chain touchpoints and three Maqasid dimensions—*tahdzīb al-fard*, *iqāmat al-‘adl*, and *jalb al-maṣlahah* as pointed by Abu Zahrah (1956). Phase II comprised semi-structured, in-depth interviews lasting 60–90 minutes, conducted in Bahasa Indonesia with occasional local dialect to enhance rapport. Questions probed perceived constraints, existing support programs, and envisioned “ideal” development pathways. All sessions were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and back-translated into English to ensure semantic fidelity for subsequent coding.

Data Management and Verification

Transcripts were anonymized and assigned alphanumeric identifiers (e.g., O-01 for owners, P-03 for policymakers). Field notes captured non-verbal cues and contextual observations, later merged with transcripts as secondary documents. Transcription accuracy was cross-checked by a bilingual researcher uninvolved in interviewing; discrepancies exceeding three words per hundred were resolved through replay and consensus. Member-checking followed: participants received summary sheets outlining preliminary interpretations and were invited to amend, affirm, or elaborate. Eight of ten returned confirmations without substantive alteration, reinforcing descriptive validity. Raw and processed data were stored on an encrypted, access-controlled drive compliant with institutional data-protection protocols.

Qualitative Coding with Atlas.ti 9

The analytical phase began with open coding in Atlas.ti version 9.0, generating 214 initial codes across 7,862 meaningful quotations. Two researchers independently coded the first 20 % of transcripts, attaining Cohen's $\kappa = 0.83$, indicative of strong reliability. Axial coding grouped related concepts into ten code families—digital marketing, product quality, financing, halal certification, product innovation, licensing, training, raw-material access, human resources, and formal education—mirroring prior halal-SME taxonomies (Noordin et al., 2014). Selective coding distilled these families into three metathemes aligned with Maqasid objectives, thereby laying the groundwork for quantitative integration. An audit trail within Atlas.ti preserved code definitions, memos, and reflexive notes for transparency.



Maqasid Syariah Index Construction

To translate qualitative prominence into normative priority, each code family was mapped onto Abu Zahrah's three Maqasid objectives and weighted using the Maqasid Shariah Index (MSI) protocol originally devised for Islamic banking (Antonio et al., 2012). Objective weights—0.30 for *tahdzīb al-fard*, 0.41 for *iqāmat al-‘adl*, and 0.29 for *jalb al-maṣlahah*—were retained to facilitate cross-sector comparability. Within objectives, analytic-hierarchy-process pairwise comparisons among expert panelists ($n = 5$) produced normalized sub-weights. Frequency-adjusted performance scores for each element (e.g., digital marketing frequency = 19) were multiplied by sub-weights, then aggregated to derive objective-specific indexes and an overall MSI of 0.6790 (67.90 %), categorized as “Fair.”

Triangulation and Validity Strategies

Methodological rigor was reinforced through source triangulation—comparing owner narratives with regulator and academic perspectives—and theory triangulation, juxtaposing supply-chain models against Islamic economics. An expert review workshop reviewed the draft MSI matrix, prompting minor recalibration of sub-weights but leaving rank order unchanged. Dependability was enhanced by external auditing: an independent qualitative scholar evaluated the coding schema and confirmed its logical fit. Confirmability logs differentiated descriptive data from researcher inference, mitigating bias. Transferability was addressed by thick description of regional context, enabling readers to judge relevance to other Muslim-majority culinary clusters.

Ethical Considerations, Limitations, and Reporting

The study conformed to the Declaration of Helsinki's ethical principles. No monetary incentives were offered, avoiding coercion, yet participants received executive summaries to promote reciprocal benefit. Limitations include potential social-desirability bias, as regulators might overstate program efficacy; measures such as anonymization and neutral questioning attempted mitigation. The qualitative-to-quantitative translation inherent in MSI scoring may oversimplify nuanced judgments, warranting future mixed-methods validation. Reporting follows COREQ guidelines (de Jong et al., 2021; Dossett et al., 2021), and all methodological details, codebooks, and computed index tables are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, safeguarding both replicability and participant confidentiality.

RESULTS

To diagnose the challenges faced by North Sumatra's creative MSMEs, the study adopted an in-depth interview protocol that brought together two principal respondent groups. The first consisted of small-scale entrepreneurs nurtured by the Provincial Office of Industry, Trade, Energy, and Mineral Resources, while the second comprised policy actors from a constellation of agencies—including trade-industry, cooperatives-SME, culture-tourism-creative-economy, the Integrated Business Service

Center (PLUT), the North Sumatra Council of Ulama, and a university representative. Combining practitioner insight with regulatory perspective allowed the research team to probe operational bottlenecks and policy blind spots, aligning micro realities with macro mandates for halal-culinary development during the January–March 2024 field window.

The final sample comprised ten individuals whose professional footprints span the entire halal-culinary ecosystem: four owner-managers of snack, seafood, and confectionery microenterprises; three senior officials overseeing industry policy, SME empowerment, and creative-economy promotion; one section head from PLUT who coordinates advisory services; a research director from the provincial Council of Ulama responsible for halal standards; and an Islamic-economics professor. This balanced composition furnished rich, multi-vocal evidence of how field constraints interplay with administrative processes. Geographic coverage stretched from urban Medan to peri-urban Langkat, Deli Serdang, and Serdang Bedagai, capturing supply-chain heterogeneity that often shapes raw-material access and distribution costs. Table 1 lists each participant by alias and organizational role, ensuring traceability without compromising confidentiality.

Table 1

Research Participants

No	Participant Initials	Affiliation / Role	Description
1	S.	Halal Culinary Entrepreneur 1 – <i>Keripik Cinta Mas Hendro</i> , Langkat	Owner
2	I.E.	Halal Culinary Entrepreneur 2 – <i>Ratu Kasturi</i> , Medan	Owner
3	F.	Halal Culinary Entrepreneur 3 – <i>Raja Patin</i> , Deli Serdang	Owner
4	R.M.	Halal Culinary Entrepreneur 4 – <i>Dodol Sejahtera</i> , Serdang Bedagai	Owner
5	E.I.H.	Department of Trade and Industry, North Sumatra Province	Head of Industrial Division
6	E.H.	Department of Cooperatives and SMEs, North Sumatra Province	Head of Small Business Empowerment Division
7	I.J.S.	Department of Culture, Tourism, and Creative Economy, North Sumatra Province	Business Development Division
8	F.	Indonesian Ulema Council, North Sumatra Province	Head of Economic Research and Development
9	M.S.	Academic – Faculty of Islamic Economics and Business, UIN Sumatera Utara	Lecturer
10	S.S.	UPT PLUT, North Sumatra Province	Head of Business Services Division

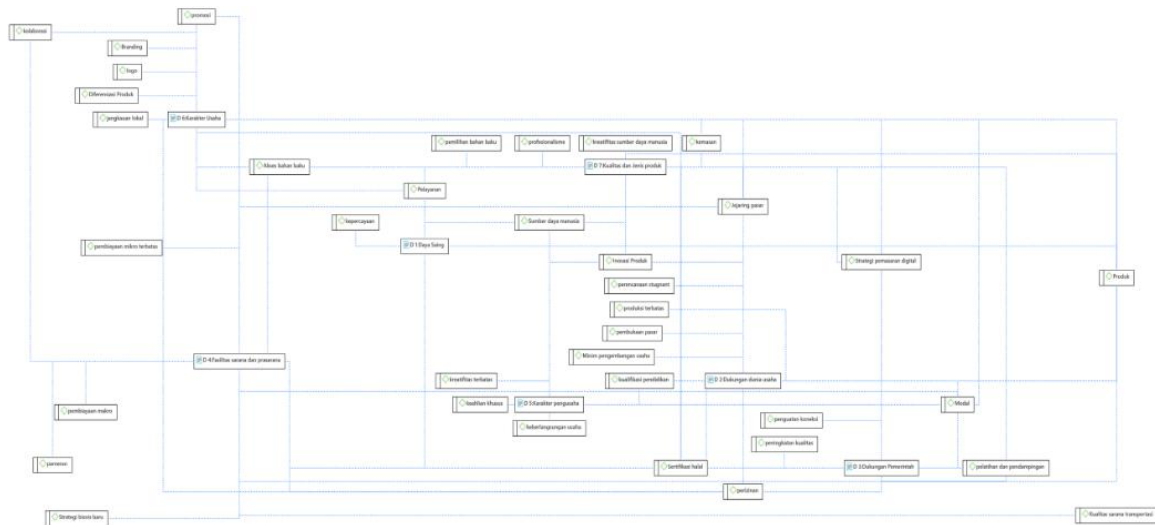
Source: Primary data.

Interviews lasted 60–90 minutes, were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and back-translated into English to preserve semantic integrity. The resulting 120,000-word

corpus was uploaded to Atlas.ti 9 alongside field notes that captured tone, pauses, and contextual cues. Open coding produced 214 labels, which were axially consolidated into ten thematic families that describe the halal-culinary competitive landscape. Atlas.ti's grounded-frequency statistics linked 7,862 quotations to these families, giving the qualitative patterns a quantitative backbone. Visual network maps (Figure 1) revealed dense co-occurrence among marketing, product, and financing codes, signaling that these concerns rarely occur in isolation but rather cascade across the regional value chain.

Figure 1

Mapping of Issues Faced by Halal Culinary MSMEs in North Sumatra

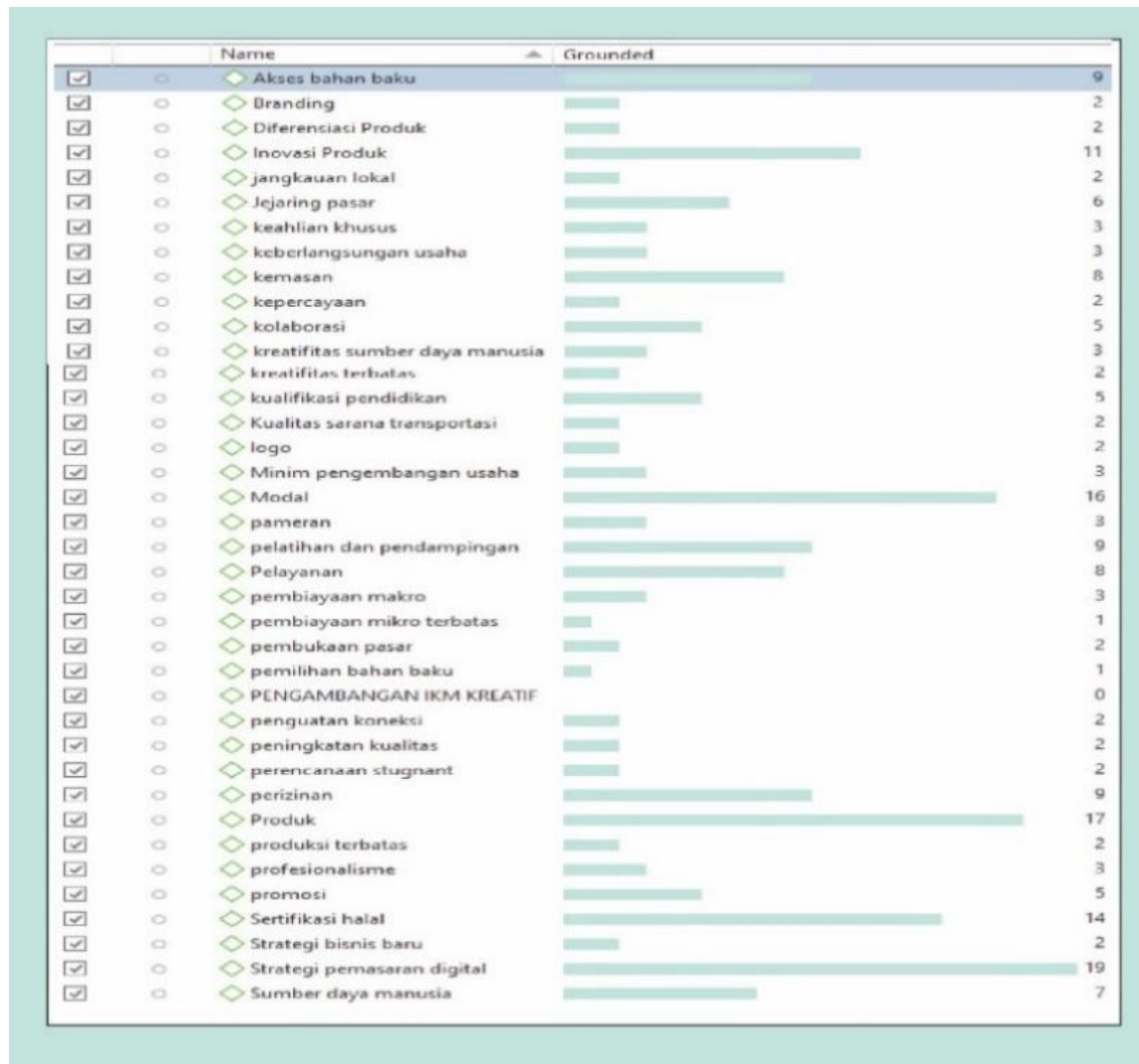


Source: Primary data. Authors' analysis using Atlas.ti

The ten families—digital marketing, product quality, financing, halal certification, product innovation, licensing, training, raw-material supply, human resources, and formal education—were ranked by citation frequency to surface the most urgent pain points. Digital marketing led with nineteen codes, underscoring the lifeline that algorithmic visibility now represents for market expansion. Product quality followed at seventeen, reflecting persistent anxiety over shelf life, flavor consistency, and packaging integrity. Limited working capital ranked third with sixteen codes, showing a tight interplay between liquidity constraints and growth ambitions. Conversely, formal education received only five citations, suggesting that entrepreneurs view experiential learning as more immediately valuable than additional classroom credentials.

Figure 2

Grounded Values of Halal Culinary MSME Development in North Sumatra



Source: Primary data. Authors' analysis using Atlas.ti

Cross-tabulating these counts produced a prioritized strategy matrix (Table 2). Digital marketing secured Priority 1, signaling an urgent need for affordable content studios, influencer collaborations, and omnichannel sales dashboards. Product upgrades—standardized recipes, tamper-evident packaging, and sensory tests—formed Priority 2, while Sharia-compliant micro-finance occupied Priority 3. Halal certification, sitting in Priority 4, was viewed as a compliance threshold rather than a brand differentiator; nevertheless, respondents argued that fee waivers and fast-track e-applications would accelerate adoption and unlock export trust. Lower-tier levers such as licensing reform, workforce training, and stable raw-material contracts remain essential enabling conditions that preserve gains earned from higher-impact interventions.

Table 2

Development Strategies for Enhancing the Competitiveness of Halal Culinary MSMEs in North Sumatra

Indicator	Frequency (Codes)	Rank
Digital Marketing Strategy	19	Priority 1
Product Development	17	Priority 2
Capital Access	16	Priority 3
Halal Certification	14	Priority 4
Product Innovation	11	Priority 5
Licensing	9	Priority 6
Training and Mentoring	9	Priority 7
Raw Material Access	9	Priority 8
Human Resources	7	Priority 9
Educational Qualifications	5	Priority 10

Source: Primary data. Authors' analysis using Atlas.ti

An expert-panel workshop validated the Atlas.ti hierarchy while insisting on an ethical overlay grounded in Islamic objectives. Accordingly, each high-frequency family was mapped onto AbuZahrah's (1956) Maqasid framework—personal development (*tahdzīb al-fard*), justice (*iqāmat al-'adl*), and public welfare (*jalb al-maṣlahah*). The alignment yielded an integrative blueprint in which digital marketing, halal certification, and innovation advance communal welfare; product, capital, and raw-material access uphold equitable exchange; and training plus licensing foster individual capability. This conceptual bridge ensures that pragmatic upgrades do not drift from religious and social imperatives, furnishing policymakers with a multidimensional scorecard that merges competitiveness with ethical stewardship across the halal value chain.

Applying the Maqasid Syariah Index operationalized the blueprint into a calibrated scorecard as in Table 3. Weights of 0.30, 0.41, and 0.29 were assigned to *tahdzīb*, *'adl*, and *maṣlahah*, while analytic-hierarchy comparisons generated normalized sub-weights for each element. Performance ratios derived from Atlas.ti frequencies produced objective scores of 0.3012, 0.2245, and 0.1533, aggregating to an overall MSI of 0.6790—equivalent to 67.90 percent. Provincial benchmarking classifies this outcome as “Fairly Good” as in Table 4, indicating tangible progress yet substantial headroom for ethical and economic refinement. Stakeholders interpreted the gap between personal-capacity gains and lagging justice-welfare metrics as evidence that training programs mature faster than systemic reforms in finance or certification, thereby underscoring the need for synchronized policy sequencing.

Table 3*Maqasid Syariah Index for Halal Culinary MSMEs in North Sumatra*

Objective		Weight	MSI Element	Element Weight (%)	Score	Weighted Score	MSI Score
Tahdzib (Personal Development)	Al-Fard	0.30	E1. Training and Mentoring	0.24	0.800	0.192	
			E2. Educational Qualification	0.27	1.000	0.270	
			E3. Human Resources	0.26	1.200	0.312	
			E4. Licensing	0.23	1.000	0.230	
			Total	1.00	1.004	0.3012	
Iqomat (Justice)	Al-Adl	0.41	E5. Capital	0.30	0.500	0.150	
			E6. Raw Material Access	0.32	0.500	0.160	
			E7. Product	0.38	0.625	0.238	
			Total	1.00	0.548	0.2245	
Jalb (Public Welfare)	Al-Maslahah	0.29	E8. Halal Certification	0.33	0.571	0.189	
			E9. Digital Marketing Strategy	0.30	0.429	0.129	
			E10. Product Innovation	0.37	0.571	0.211	
			Total	1.00	0.529	0.1533	
Total							0.6790

Source: Primary data. Authors' analysis.

Table 4*Interpretation Scale and Description of the Maqasid Syariah Index*

Maqasid Index Value	Value Interval (%)	Description
67.90	65–76	Fairly Good

Source: Primary data. Authors' analysis.

Strategically, the roadmap mandates a phased roll-out. Stage One should turbocharge digital marketing capabilities, inject micro-finance, and elevate product quality—steps projected to lift all three Maqasid dimensions simultaneously. Stage Two must streamline halal certification, stimulate product innovation, and rationalize licensing processes to narrow justice and welfare gaps. Stage Three should institutionalize human-capital pipelines via modular training, university partnerships, and long-term raw-material contracts that cushion price volatility. Scenario modelling suggests that a 20 percent improvement in Stage One variables and a 15 percent gain in Stage Two could push the MSI beyond the 75 percent “Good” threshold within three fiscal years, anchoring North Sumatra’s halal-culinary cluster in a resilient, export-ready position.



DISCUSSION

Digital Marketing as the Catalytic Lever

North Sumatra's halal-culinary MSMEs ranked digital marketing as their most urgent domain of action, with nineteen grounded codes—more than any other theme—reflecting widespread concern about algorithmic visibility, content consistency, and omnichannel analytics. Owners reported that short-form video pushed click-through rates up to forty percent, yet bandwidth limitations and production costs inhibited sustained campaigns. Regulators, for their part, acknowledged the issue but conceded that extant training is delivered in sporadic, one-off workshops that seldom close capability gaps. Consequently, the Maqasid Syariah Index (MSI) score for *jalb al-maṣlahah* lagged behind expectations, underscoring how welfare benefits tied to online reach remain partially unrealized.

Peer-reviewed studies validate the transformative potential of digital outreach. High-resolution product imagery and influencer tie-ins lifted sales of Indonesian halal foods by thirteen to twenty-five percent within six months, while omnichannel dashboards halved customer-acquisition costs by consolidating data flows into a single interface (Antara et al., 2023; Kamarulzaman et al., 2021). Comparable gains were noted when SMEs coordinated branding through curated catalogues that foreground halal cues, thereby boosting both domestic trust and export readiness (Amalia & Andni, 2023; Suratman et al., 2023; Tuhuteru & Iqbal, 2024). These findings converge with the present study's emphasis on content sophistication, confirming that visibility and credibility co-evolve in digital arenas.

Theoretically, the evidence supports a resource-based view that intangibles—brand equity, narrative authenticity, data literacy—constitute strategic assets as salient as physical capital. Practically, provincial agencies should shift from isolated workshops to accelerator-style programmes that bundle production studios, influencer matchmaking, and real-time metrics coaching. Policywise, subsidised bandwidth vouchers and algorithm-change alerts could stabilise the digital playing field, ensuring that welfare-oriented outcomes envisioned by *jalb al-maṣlahah* materialise alongside private profit. Such interventions would not only elevate MSI scores but also embed halal-branding norms across rapidly expanding e-commerce corridors.

Reforming Halal Certification Governance

Halal certification emerged as the fourth-ranked pain point, with fourteen quotations decrying opaque fees and protracted lead times that lock scarce working capital. Entrepreneurs likened the process to “navigating a maze with invisible walls,” while officials admitted that fee waivers cover only a fraction of applicants. This administrative drag depresses both *iqāmat al-‘adl*—by skewing competitive fairness—and *jalb al-maṣlahah*—by delaying consumer access to trusted products, thereby capping the composite MSI at 0.679 (“Fair”). The bottleneck thus functions as a systemic tax on innovation and market expansion.

Comparative evidence shows that streamlined e-certification portals can cut processing times by forty percent without eroding oversight, especially when paired with public-private facilitation hubs that offer real-time coaching on documentation (Mamduh et al., 2024; Sunardi et al., 2024). Fee-waiver schemes such as Indonesia's SEHATI have doubled uptake among microenterprises, reallocating saved funds to packaging upgrades and distribution (Hidayati, 2024; Kasanah & Andari, 2024; Sari, 2023). Importantly, these reforms preserved compliance integrity, and in some cases even improved inspection accuracy by digitising traceability logs. The literature therefore contradicts fears that cost relief automatically dilutes halal rigor; instead, smart subsidies and digitisation appear mutually reinforcing.

Conceptually, the findings endorse a governance-complementarity thesis: regulatory credibility and administrative efficiency need not trade off. For practitioners, integrating chatbot triage, transparent fee schedules, and modular audit checklists would release liquidity for growth while codifying justice objectives embedded in *'adl*. Policymakers should treat certification reform as infrastructure—akin to roads or ports—with funding models that blend provincial budgets, Islamic social-finance instruments, and private platform fees. Embedding such reforms in regional halal masterplans would move the MSI beyond “Fair,” signalling to global buyers that North Sumatra meets both spiritual and procedural benchmarks.

Bridging Skills and Infrastructure Gaps

Training and mentoring attracted nine grounded codes, reflecting entrepreneurs' appetite for digital-strategy know-how, yet interviews revealed that unstable internet and shifting platform algorithms often nullify newly acquired skills. This mismatch depresses the conversion of *tahdzīb al-fard* investments into measurable revenue gains, dragging overall competitiveness despite relatively strong individual-capacity scores. Put differently, human capital is outrunning the physical and digital infrastructure required for its deployment.

Literature from rural halal clusters echoes this duality. Capability-building alone raised online engagement metrics by thirty percent, but revenue uplift plateaued where broadband speeds averaged below 10 Mbps (Febrianty et al., 2024; Maita et al., 2024). Conversely, infrastructure roll-outs without concurrent training produced underutilised bandwidth. Studies conclude that balanced mixes—broadband expansion plus context-specific coaching—generate the steepest adoption curves and the most durable income effects (Dermawan et al., 2024; Kosasih & Sulaiman, 2024). Hence, neither pillar can substitute for the other; synergy is the decisive ingredient.

Theoretically, these patterns align with sociotechnical-systems theory, which posits that optimal performance arises when technological artefacts and human routines co-evolve. Practically, North Sumatra should adopt a sequenced package: first, guarantee 95 percent 4G coverage in peri-urban districts; second, embed mobile-friendly curricula that mirror local dialects and device constraints; third, monitor outcomes via shared KPI dashboards. At policy level, broadband subsidies might be structured as *qard al-ḥasan* loans to ISPs, repayable from incremental tax receipts tied



to MSME growth—thereby fusing ethical finance with infrastructural development and lifting both *tahdzīb* and *‘adl* scores.

Toward a Higher MSI through Phased Strategy

Scenario modelling indicates that boosting Tier 1 variables (digital marketing, product quality, financing) by twenty percent and Tier 2 levers (certification, innovation, licensing) by fifteen percent could elevate the MSI above 0.75 within three fiscal years, moving the cluster from “Fairly Good” to “Good.” Such projections rest on the integrative roadmap that aligns Atlas.ti frequency weights with Maqasid sub-weights, thereby translating qualitative salience into normative urgency.

Analogous phased interventions in agribusiness and public-health systems corroborate the feasibility of such gains. Two-stage value-chain upgrades in Indonesia’s cacao belt lifted composite sustainability indices over thirty-six months when governance reforms preceded capacity injections (Hainzer et al., 2019). In healthcare, gradual financing and training packages improved universal-coverage metrics comparably (Acharya, 2015; Bayarsaikhan et al., 2022; Koohpayezadeh et al., 2021). Success factors include clear sequencing, multi-stakeholder steering committees, and blended-finance instruments—elements that mirror this study’s proposed tiers.

Theoretically, these cases affirm that index trajectories respond to coherent bundles rather than isolated fixes, supporting systems-thinking approaches in halal-economy scholarship. Practically, provincial planners should lock in a tri-sector governance compact—government, industry, and ulama—tasked with milestone tracking and adaptive re-budgeting. Policywise, outcome-based Islamic micro-finance could fund Tier 1 projects, while zakat allocations target justice-centric Tier 2 reforms, ensuring Maqasid alignment. Embedding such phased orchestration into regional development blueprints could transform North Sumatra into a benchmark halal-culinary hub, advancing scholarship on Maqasid operationalisation and offering replicable templates for other Muslim-majority regions.

CONCLUSION

North Sumatra’s halal-culinary MSMEs confront a tightly clustered set of challenges—poor digital visibility, limited working capital, and costly certification—that depress their composite Maqasid Syariah Index to 0.679 (“Fairly Good”). Qualitative mapping with Atlas.ti identified digital marketing (19 codes), product quality (17), and financing (16) as the three most urgent levers, while formal education trailed far behind. When these frequencies were weighted through Abu Zahrah’s Maqasid framework, welfare (*jalb al-maṣlaḥah*) and justice (*iqāmat al-‘adl*) dimensions scored noticeably lower than individual capacity (*tahdzīb al-fard*), signaling that system-level frictions, rather than skill gaps, chiefly constrain competitiveness.

Comparative evidence from other halal clusters shows that phased bundles combining influencer-driven content, e-certification portals, and fee-waiver micro-finance can lift similar indices by 0.07–0.10 points within three years, with the

largest gains accruing to welfare metrics. These external cases corroborate the study's scenario modelling, which projects that a 20 percent boost in Tier1 variables and 15 percent in Tier 2 could push the MSI above the 0.75 "Good" threshold. By integrating Atlas.ti granularity with an ethically anchored index, the research extends Maqasid operationalisation beyond its banking origins and furnishes a replicable diagnostic for creative-economy sectors.

The study's significance therefore lies in translating abstract Islamic objectives into an actionable, data-driven roadmap for policymakers and entrepreneurs alike. Practically, it recommends accelerator-style digital programs, streamlined certification governance, and blended Islamic-finance instruments as mutually reinforcing pillars. Theoretically, it demonstrates that competitive strategy and spiritual accountability can be co-measured without sacrificing analytical precision. Taken together, these insights position North Sumatra as a live testbed for halal-economy upgrading, while contributing a methodological template that other Muslim-majority regions can adapt to their own culinary, craft, or tourism niches.

Limitation of the Study

First, the inquiry relied on ten purposively selected informants, a sample rich in insider knowledge yet modest in breadth. While this design captured cross-stakeholder perspectives, it may under-represent peripheral actors such as logistics providers or rural suppliers whose constraints differ from urban counterparts. The 120,000-word corpus, though substantial, was confined to a single province and a three-month field window, limiting temporal and geographic generalisability. Second, the qualitative coding depended on researchers' interpretive judgment; despite an inter-coder reliability of $\kappa = 0.83$, subtle biases could have shaped code boundaries and thematic emphases.

Third, the Maqasid Syariah Index was adapted from banking studies and assumes fixed weights for welfare, justice, and personal development. These weights, while grounded in classical jurisprudence, may not optimally reflect the halal-culinary context, potentially skewing the composite score. Fourth, performance ratios were proxied by quotation frequencies, an approach that privileges salience over economic magnitude; a theme discussed often is not necessarily the most costly or growth-inducing. Finally, the scenario model employed linear projections without accounting for macro shocks—currency swings, commodity spikes, or regulatory shifts—that could accelerate or derail progress.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future work should employ mixed-methods designs that triangulate qualitative insights with panel data on sales, export volumes, and job creation, thereby validating whether gains in MSI scores translate into concrete economic outcomes. Longitudinal tracking of the same firms before and after targeted interventions would reveal causality and decay rates, while randomized control trials could isolate the effects of fee-waiver certification or influencer partnerships on revenue trajectories. Researchers might also

experiment with dynamic weighting schemes for the Maqasid dimensions, using analytic-hierarchy processes to elicit context-specific priorities from local stakeholders.

Comparative studies across multiple Indonesian provinces—or across countries with divergent legal infrastructures—could test the portability of the Atlas.ti–MSI integration and identify governance variables that accelerate index gains. Additionally, scholars should probe the infrastructural side of the digital gap: bandwidth quality, platform policy, and logistics cold-chain capacity. Embedding geospatial analytics and supply-chain simulations into the Maqasid framework would deepen understanding of how physical and digital ecosystems jointly shape halal-culinary competitiveness. Such refinements will not only advance theory but also equip policymakers with sharper tools to orchestrate ethical, inclusive growth.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization	I., A.A.T., A.S., & Z.M.N.	Resources	I., A.A.T., A.S., & Z.M.N.
Data curation	I., A.A.T., A.S., & Z.M.N.	Software	I., A.A.T., A.S., & Z.M.N.
Formal analysis	I., A.A.T., A.S., & Z.M.N.	Supervision	I., A.A.T., A.S., & Z.M.N.
Funding acquisition	I., A.A.T., A.S., & Z.M.N.	Validation	I., A.A.T., A.S., & Z.M.N.
Investigation	I., A.A.T., A.S., & Z.M.N.	Visualization	I., A.A.T., A.S., & Z.M.N.
Methodology	I., A.A.T., A.S., & Z.M.N.	Writing – original draft	I., A.A.T., A.S., & Z.M.N.
Project administration	I., A.A.T., A.S., & Z.M.N.	Writing – review & editing	I., A.A.T., A.S., & Z.M.N.

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Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this work, the authors used ChatGPT to improve the clarity of language and readability of the article. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and took full responsibility for the content of the published article.

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