

Islamic Legal Review of Online Lending Practices (A Case Study of the Community in Muara Sabak Timur District)

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Abstract:

The rapid expansion of online lending services in Indonesia has increased public access to financing while simultaneously raising legal, ethical, and Sharia compliance concerns. This study aims to examine online lending practices in Muara Sabak Timur District and assess their conformity with Islamic legal principles. Employing a qualitative case study design, the research draws on in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis involving users of online lending services. The data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns of practice, underlying driving factors, and their social as well as normative implications. The findings indicate that the use of online loans is predominantly driven by consumptive needs and facilitated by ease of access and rapid disbursement, whereas users' understanding of cost structures and contractual (akad) arrangements remains limited. The imposition of interest, ambiguity in contractual terms, and certain debt collection methods suggest potential inconsistencies with the principles of *riba*, *gharar*, and justice in *muamalah*. This study contributes to strengthening Islamic economic law analysis within the context of digital finance and provides a foundation for developing more equitable and Sharia-compliant digital financing models.

Keywords:

Islamic Law; Online Lending; Fintech; Riba; Muara Sabak Timur; Maqāṣid al-Syarī'ah.



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INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology has fundamentally transformed the global financial system through the expansion of financial technology (fintech), which delivers app-based financing services that are fast, accessible, and contactless, thereby reshaping interactions between financial service providers and users (Ozili, 2020). This transformation intensified in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, as digital financial services experienced significant adoption across developing countries, including Indonesia, in response to mobility restrictions and rising liquidity needs (Haddad & Hornuf, 2022). In Indonesia, peer-to-peer (P2P) lending has grown rapidly as an alternative instrument of financial inclusion for underserved and low-income communities (Suryono, Budi, & Purwandari, 2021). Nevertheless, empirical studies highlight increasing risks of high interest rates, information asymmetry, misuse of personal data, and unethical collection practices, particularly among illegal platforms (Setiawan et al., 2022). These dynamics generate complex social and legal implications, especially within Muslim communities where financial transactions are perceived not

merely as economic exchanges but as moral-legal acts subject to Sharia principles (Rahman & Zainuddin, 2021).

Although national regulations have been enacted to govern technology-based lending, formal supervision has not fully eradicated illegal online lending and consumer exploitation at the local level (Pratama & Al Arif, 2023). Contemporary scholarship further emphasizes that limited digital financial literacy exacerbates vulnerability to opaque electronic contracts and high-interest schemes (Bongomin et al., 2020). Within Islamic legal discourse, interest-based lending may be categorized as *riba*, which is strictly prohibited (Usmani, 2021). While studies on Islamic fintech in Indonesia largely concentrate on institutional Sharia compliance and business models, empirical case-based analyses examining conventional online lending practices from an Islamic legal perspective at the community level remain limited (Yumna & Huda, 2022). This gap underscores the academic urgency of contextual investigations grounded in lived social realities.

From a conceptual standpoint, Islamic law regulates debt transactions within the framework of *fiqh muamalah*, emphasizing justice (*'adl*), mutual consent (*tarāḍī*), contractual transparency, and the prohibition of *riba*, *gharar*, and *zulm* (Dusuki & Bouheraoua, 2021). *Riba* is understood as an unjustified increment over the principal of a loan without legitimate countervalue, often represented in modern finance through fixed interest on deferred payments (Ahmed, 2020). The theory of *maqāṣid al-syarī'ah* further positions the protection of wealth (*ḥifẓ al-māl*) as a central objective of Islamic law, requiring financial systems to promote public benefit and prevent harm (Auda, 2021). In digital contracts, issues of *gharar* arise when cost structures, penalties, or collection mechanisms lack clarity, potentially undermining contractual validity from a Sharia perspective (Hassan & Aliyu, 2020). Consequently, integrating normative Sharia analysis with empirical case study research becomes essential for a comprehensive evaluation.

This study therefore aims to: (1) describe the forms and mechanisms of online lending practices within the community of Muara Sabak Timur District; (2) analyze the social, economic, and psychological factors driving their use; and (3) assess these practices through the lens of Islamic law, particularly concerning contractual validity, *riba*, and ethical dimensions of *muamalah*. Employing a qualitative case study strategy, data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, and analyzed using an interactive model suitable for contextual and in-depth exploration of socio-religious phenomena (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). This methodological choice addresses the relative scarcity of qualitative investigations into lived experiences of online lending users, compared to the dominance of quantitative surveys in fintech research (Nawaz, 2021; Yin, 2021).

The article contributes to the literature by integrating empirical analysis of conventional online lending at the community level with normative evaluation grounded in *riba*, *gharar*, and *maqāṣid al-syarī'ah*. Previous studies have predominantly focused on Islamic fintech development, institutional governance, and financial inclusion (Firmansyah & Anwar, 2022; Batunanggar, 2021; Rabbani, Khan, & Thalassinou, 2021), while ethical concerns such as data privacy and collection practices have also been highlighted (Putri & Sari, 2023). However, macro-regulatory perspectives often overlook

localized user experiences and their normative implications. By bridging classical fiqh muamalah with contemporary digital finance theory and consumer protection discourse (Zetsche, Buckley, Arner, & Barberis, 2020; Alam, 2022; Dusuki & Abozaid, 2020), this study advances a contextualized understanding of Islamic economic law within the evolving landscape of digital finance.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study strategy, as it seeks to develop an in-depth understanding of online lending practices within a specific socio-religious context, namely the community of Muara Sabak Timur District, Tanjung Jabung Timur Regency, Jambi Province. The case study strategy was selected because it is effective for exploring contemporary phenomena in real-life settings where the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly defined (Yin, 2021). A qualitative approach enables the researcher to examine subjective meanings, perceptions, and social dynamics underlying the use of online loans, including ethical dimensions and understandings of Islamic law that cannot be reduced to statistical measures (Busetto, Wick, & Gumbinger, 2020).

Data sources consist of both primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation involving members of the community who have used online lending services (both legal and illegal platforms), religious leaders (ulama and ustaz), and village and sub-district government officials familiar with local social conditions. Secondary data include regulations issued by the Financial Services Authority (Otoritas Jasa Keuangan), DSN-MUI Fatwa No. 117/DSN-MUI/II/2018 concerning information technology-based financing services, and scholarly journal articles related to fintech and Islamic economic law. Data collection was conducted using semi-structured interview guidelines to ensure thematic consistency while allowing flexibility for narrative exploration (Kallio et al., 2016). Inclusion criteria comprised: (1) community members who have used or are currently using online lending services; (2) religious leaders actively providing Islamic legal guidance in the area; and (3) local government officials aware of the socio-economic impacts of online lending. Exclusion criteria included individuals without direct experience or relevant knowledge of online lending practices. Informants were selected through purposive sampling based on experience, relevance, and capacity to provide in-depth information, consistent with qualitative participant selection principles (Campbell et al., 2020).

The unit of analysis in this study is the practice of online lending within the Muara Sabak Timur community, encompassing digital contractual mechanisms, interest systems, collection patterns, and their socio-economic impacts. The data were analyzed using an interactive analysis technique comprising three principal stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification conducted iteratively and simultaneously (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2019). The analytical process followed a thematic approach by identifying key categories such as forms of contract (akad), elements of riba, indications of gharar, collection practices, and community perceptions of Islamic law, as recommended in thematic analysis for uncovering patterns of meaning in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Data validity was ensured through source and method triangulation by comparing interview

findings with observational data and supporting documents to confirm consistency (Noble & Heale, 2019). A normative Sharia analysis was subsequently conducted by comparing the empirical findings with the principles of *fiqh muamalah*, the prohibitions of *riba* and *gharar*, and the framework of *maqāsid al-syarī'ah* as a conceptual evaluative tool. The entire analytical process was conducted manually using matrix-based thematic coding to ensure data traceability and interpretive coherence.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

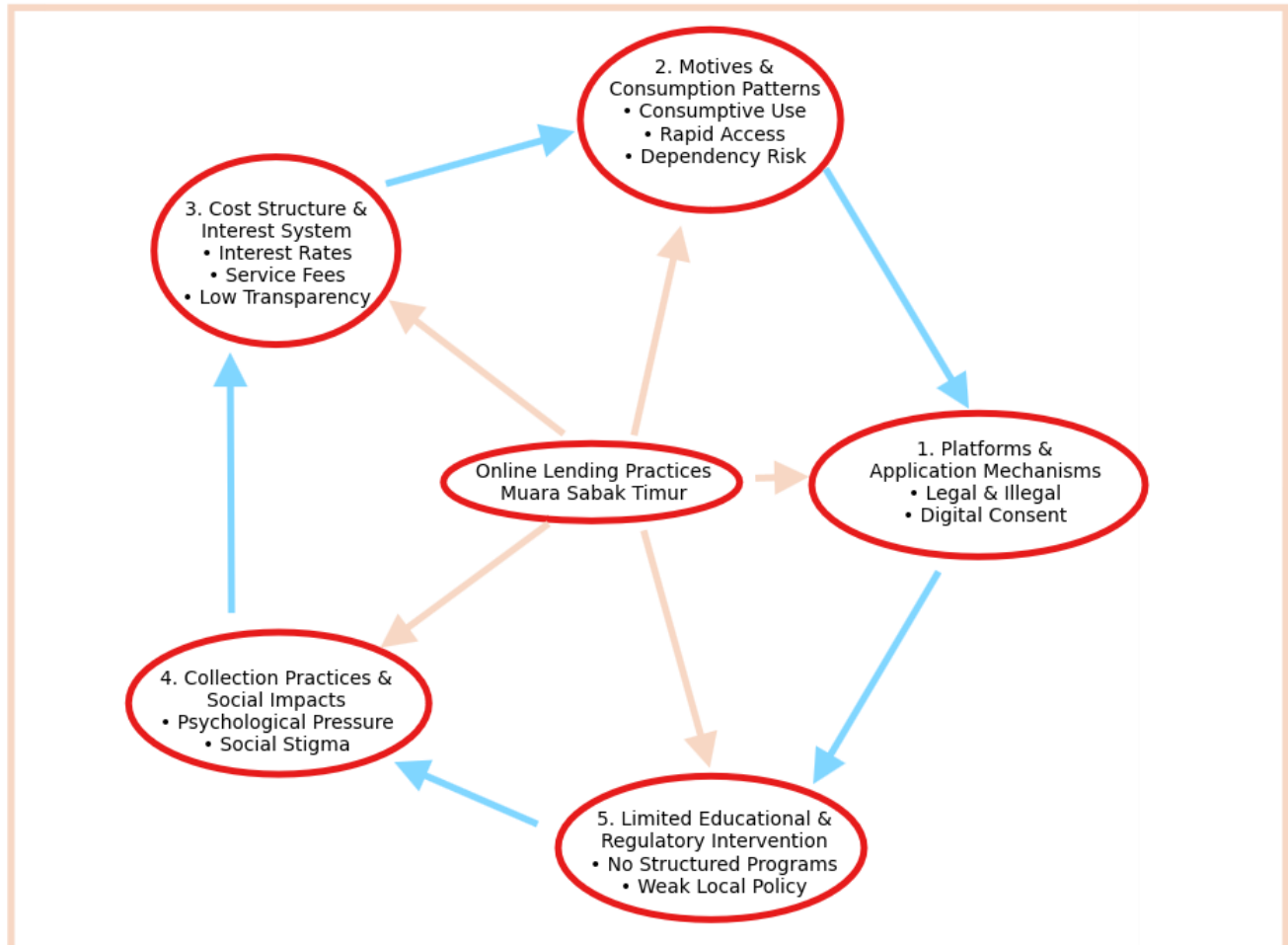
Results

Based on the process of data reduction and categorization through interactive analysis of in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation, five principal themes emerged that represent online lending practices in Muara Sabak Timur District: (1) variations in platforms and loan application mechanisms; (2) motives for use and consumption patterns; (3) cost structures and interest systems; (4) collection practices and social impacts; and (5) the limited presence of educational and regulatory interventions at the local level.

The Finding	Key Points
Platforms & Application Mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of both legal (OJK-registered) and illegal platforms (e.g., DanaRupiah, Kredivo, Akulaku vs. Pinjaman Cepat Tunai, Dompot Kilat). • Fully digital application process (ID upload, selfie verification). • No physical meetings or verbal contract explanation. • Click-based digital consent (adhesion contract). • Platform dominance in determining contract clauses.
Motives & Consumption Patterns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Predominantly consumptive use (electronics, debt repayment, urgent household needs, lifestyle). • Minor use for micro-business capital. • Main drivers: easy access, rapid disbursement (1–24 hours), no collateral. • Repeated borrowing leading to dependency and over-indebtedness.
Cost Structure & Interest System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily/weekly interest rates with varying percentages. • Additional administrative fees and late penalties. • Limited user understanding of total repayment obligations. • Presence of “service fees” and “platform fees.” • Potential information asymmetry between provider and borrower. • Increment over principal identified as a central issue in <i>fiqh muamalah</i> literature (descriptive, not evaluative here).
Collection Practices & Social Impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repeated messages, threats of contact dissemination, psychological pressure (especially on illegal platforms). • Social stigma due to debt information shared with relatives/colleagues. • Limited public awareness of differences between legal and illegal platforms. • Low digital financial literacy increases vulnerability to exploitative practices.
Limited Educational & Regulatory Intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No structured local programs addressing economic and religious implications. • Interventions limited to informal advice or general sermons. • No explicit local policies on prevention or education regarding illegal lending. • Weak integration between national regulation and community-level education. • Sharia value-based prevention (<i>maqāsid al-syarī'ah</i>) not systematically implemented.

Regarding the first finding, informants identified the use of legal platforms registered and supervised by the Financial Services Authority (Otoritas Jasa Keuangan/OJK), such as DanaRupiah, Kredivo, Akulaku, Modalku, Investree, Amarnya, KoinWorks, Indodana, Julo, and AdaKami, as well as illegal platforms including Pinjaman Cepat Tunai, Dompot Kilat, Uang Kilat Pro, DanaPlus Now, and Cash Flash. Loan applications were conducted entirely through digital applications, with identity verification based on uploading national ID cards (KTP) and selfies, without any physical meetings or

verbal explanation of contractual terms. This pattern reflects the technology-based peer-to-peer lending model emphasizing efficiency and automated credit processes. Observation of digital agreements indicates that consent was given through click-based approval (digital consent) without negotiation of terms and conditions, consistent with findings on adhesion contracts in Indonesian fintech lending that highlight platform dominance in determining contractual clauses.



The second finding concerns the driving factors behind the use of online loans. Interviews reveal that most users utilized loans for consumptive purposes, such as purchasing electronic goods, repaying previous debts, covering urgent household needs, and financing lifestyle expenditures. A smaller proportion used loans as micro-business capital. The primary motives identified were ease of access, rapid disbursement (typically within 1–24 hours), and the absence of collateral requirements. These findings align with research indicating that quick access and simplified procedures are dominant factors in fintech lending adoption among low-income communities. Several informants reported that initial use was experimental but gradually evolved into dependency due to the convenience of repeated borrowing, reflecting patterns of over-indebtedness documented in digital financing risk studies.

The third finding highlights the cost structure and interest system applied by these platforms. Informants reported daily or weekly interest rates with varying percentages, in addition to administrative fees and late-payment penalties that were not always clearly understood at the time of

application. Some users indicated that total repayment amounts could increase significantly relative to the principal within a short period. Application screenshots revealed additional components labeled as “service fees” and “platform fees” added to the loan amount. This phenomenon corresponds with studies on cost transparency in fintech lending that identify potential information asymmetry between providers and users. In contemporary fiqh muamalah literature, any increment over the principal of a loan constitutes a central concern, although this section limits itself to describing empirical practices without normative evaluation.

The fourth finding relates to collection practices and their social consequences. Informants who experienced delayed payments reported receiving repeated messages, threats of disseminating contact information, and psychological pressure from debt collectors, particularly on illegal platforms. Some families described experiencing social stigma due to the circulation of debt-related information among relatives and colleagues. Similar practices have been reported in research addressing unethical collection methods and personal data protection violations within online lending ecosystems. Observations further indicate that many community members were unable to distinguish between legal and illegal platforms, thereby increasing their exposure to risk. Other studies emphasize that low levels of digital financial literacy heighten vulnerability to exploitative practices in electronic contracts.

The fifth finding reveals the limited scope of educational outreach and regulatory intervention at the sub-district level. Interviews with village officials and community leaders indicate the absence of structured programs specifically addressing the economic and religious implications of online lending. Existing efforts were largely confined to informal advice or general sermons without technical guidance. No explicit local policies were identified concerning the prevention or education of illegal online lending practices. This condition aligns with studies noting that national regulatory oversight is often insufficiently integrated with community-based education initiatives. Furthermore, value-based Sharia approaches to prevention have not been systematically implemented, despite literature underscoring the importance of integrating *maqāsid al-syarī'ah* into digital financial governance to safeguard Muslim communities. Overall, these findings present an empirical account of the forms, mechanisms, motivations, cost structures, social impacts, and regulatory context of online lending practices in Muara Sabak Timur, organized into five principal themes without advancing normative judgment at this stage.

Discussion

The findings indicate that online lending practices in Muara Sabak Timur District are characterized by the dominance of unilateral digital contract mechanisms, predominantly consumptive use, significant interest structures and additional fees, collection practices that generate psychological pressure, and the limited presence of educational and regulatory interventions at the local level. These findings directly address the research questions concerning the forms and mechanisms of online lending practices, the driving factors behind their use, and their compatibility with Islamic legal principles. Empirically, these characteristics reflect the broader pattern of fintech lending in developing countries, which relies on rapid access and algorithmic automation in credit processes (Bazarbash & Beaton, 2020). However, this digital acceleration is often not accompanied by adequate

consumer protection, particularly among communities with low levels of financial literacy (Morgan & Trinh, 2020). Thus, the findings reveal a tension between digital financial inclusion and the socio-economic risks that accompany it.

Within the framework of *fiqh muamalah*, the practice of charging interest and additional fees on loan principals, as identified in this study, may potentially be categorized as *riba nasi'ah*, namely an increment stipulated due to deferred payment (Ayub, 2020). Contemporary literature emphasizes that interest-based lending structures in modern financial systems remain a central issue in Islamic legal discourse because they involve risk transfer mechanisms that disproportionately burden borrowers (Iqbal & Mirakhor, 2021). Furthermore, digital contracts that provide no room for negotiation and lack clarity regarding detailed cost components indicate a potential element of *gharar* arising from information asymmetry, as discussed in studies on electronic contracts within the digital economy (Alharbi, 2021). From the perspective of *maqāṣid al-syarī'ah*, practices that generate financial and psychological distress may be viewed as inconsistent with the objectives of protecting wealth (*ḥifẓ al-māl*) and human dignity (*ḥifẓ al-'ird*) (Kamali, 2021).

When compared with previous studies, the finding that online loans are predominantly used for consumptive purposes aligns with research demonstrating that digital credit access often encourages consumptive behavior and over-indebtedness among vulnerable groups (Gonzalez & Dietrich, 2021). However, in contrast to studies highlighting the potential of fintech as an instrument for empowering micro, small, and medium enterprises (Muneeza & Mustapha, 2021), this research shows that productive usage remains relatively limited within the studied community. Additionally, the aggressive collection practices observed reinforce prior research reporting ethical violations and misuse of personal data within fintech lending ecosystems (Chen, Wu, & Yang, 2022). Accordingly, this study both affirms global findings and highlights a local religious dimension that has received limited scholarly attention.

The scholarly contribution of this article lies in integrating empirical case study analysis with a normative evaluation grounded in *maqāṣid al-syarī'ah*, thereby extending Islamic economic law literature from a predominantly doctrinal approach toward a contextual one. Previous studies have largely focused on the development of formal Islamic fintech models and business structures (Rahim & Amin, 2022), whereas this study examines conventional fintech practices encountered by Muslim communities and evaluates them through Sharia principles. This approach aligns with the view that Islamic law must remain responsive to social and technological dynamics (Auda, 2021). Consequently, the article contributes theoretically to the development of a *maqāṣid*-based evaluative framework for the digital economy.

Methodologically, the use of a qualitative case study enables an in-depth exploration of users' subjective experiences and the social context shaping online lending practices, complementing the dominance of quantitative approaches in fintech literature (Rabbani et al., 2022). This approach allows for analysis of the interaction between religious norms, state regulation, and everyday economic practices, as recommended in socio-legal studies of Islamic finance (Ali & Hasan, 2021). Thus, the methodological contribution of this research lies in strengthening a micro-sociological perspective

within Islamic economic law studies.

Nevertheless, this study has limitations. First, its focus on a single sub-district restricts the generalizability of findings to other regions with different social characteristics. Second, the limited number of informants and reliance on self-reported data may affect the comprehensiveness of the findings. Third, the study does not conduct a comparative quantitative analysis of interest rates or effective repayment ratios, as undertaken in empirical financial research (Demirgüç-Kunt et al., 2022). These limitations indicate that the findings should be understood within a localized and exploratory context.

The policy implications of this research include the importance of integrating Sharia value-based digital financial literacy education at the community level, as recommended in studies on financial literacy and consumer protection (Lusardi & Messy, 2021). Regulators should also strengthen oversight of collection practices and cost transparency to prevent ethical violations (Arner, Buckley, Zetsche, & Veidt, 2020). For religious institutions, the findings underscore the urgency of developing practical maqāṣid-based guidelines in response to digital financial innovation.

For future research, comparative inter-regional studies or mixed-method approaches combining quantitative analysis of effective interest rates with normative Sharia evaluation are recommended to enrich empirical evidence. Further studies may also explore alternative models such as digital qard hasan or risk-sharing-based financing discussed in Islamic fintech literature (Hassan & Rabbani, 2021). An interdisciplinary approach integrating Islamic law, behavioral economics, and financial technology studies would broaden the analytical scope of online lending dynamics within contemporary Muslim societies.

CONCLUSION

This study finds that online lending practices in Muara Sabak Timur District operate through unilateral digital contract mechanisms characterized by rapid processing and minimal substantive verification, and are predominantly used for consumptive purposes. The financing structure includes interest charges, service fees, and late-payment penalties which, in practice, are often not comprehensively understood by users. Meanwhile, collection patterns on certain platforms—particularly illegal ones—generate psychological pressure and significant social consequences. The primary driving factors behind the use of these services are ease of access, rapid disbursement, and the absence of collateral requirements, amid low levels of digital financial literacy and limited outreach from government and religious institutions. From the perspective of Islamic law, these practices indicate potential non-compliance in relation to interest (riba), contractual clarity (gharar), and ethical principles of muamalah, particularly when exploitation or injustice occurs in the relationship between providers and users.

Theoretically, this article contributes to the development of Islamic economic law scholarship by integrating empirical analysis based on a local case study with normative evaluation grounded in fiqh muamalah and maqāṣid al-syarī'ah within the context of the digital economy. This approach expands the discourse beyond institutional discussions of Islamic fintech toward a critical analysis of

conventional fintech practices directly experienced by Muslim communities. Practically, the findings provide an argumentative foundation for regulators, local governments, and religious institutions to strengthen Sharia value-based financial literacy education, enhance oversight of collection practices and cost transparency, and promote the development of more equitable and socially beneficial digital financing models.

Going forward, further research may broaden the geographical scope and employ comparative or mixed-method approaches to obtain a more comprehensive and measurable understanding of the economic impact and level of Sharia compliance in online lending practices. Additionally, exploring the design of digital financing models based on risk-sharing principles or qard hasan within modern financial technology frameworks represents an important agenda for providing alternative financial systems aligned with the values of justice, protection of wealth, and the welfare of Muslim communities in the digital era.

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