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ECOTHEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE STORY OF THE PEOPLE OF SABA' (Q.S. SABA' [34]: 15–17) TO MINIMIZE THE FOOD WASTE CRISIS IN INDONESIA

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Abstract: This study aims to examine the eco-theological interpretation of the story of the Saba' people in Q.S. Saba' [34]: 15–17 to minimize the food waste crisis in Indonesia. The study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, drawing primary sources from the Qur'an (particularly Q.S. Saba' [34]: 15–17), supported by verses addressing *tabdhīr* (wastefulness), *isrāf* (excessiveness), resource reuse, and the prohibition of environmental degradation. Secondary sources include classical and contemporary exegetical works, literature on Islamic environmental jurisprudence (*fiqh al-bī'ah*), ecotheology, the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), and food waste studies. This study's novelty lies in its attempt to link TPB with Qur'anic values as an ethical framework for food waste management. The results of the study show that the food crisis is not only rooted in technical distribution issues, but also in a crisis of spiritual values. Integrating Ecotheology and TPB shows that attitudes (the belief that wastefulness is wrong), subjective norms (social encouragement through preaching and community), and behavioral control (regulatory and facility support) can strengthen changes in people's behavior toward a zero-waste lifestyle. These findings confirm that solutions to food issues in Indonesia require both a technical approach and a spiritual transformation based on the values of the Qur'an. Accordingly, this study recommends empirically testing the proposed Qur'anic-TPB model through field surveys or case studies to assess the extent to which Qur'anic eco-theological values can translate into measurable behavioral changes in food waste management.

Keywords: Al-Qur'an, Ecotheology, Food Waste Crisis, Interpretation.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan mengkaji tafsir ekoteologi atas kisah Kaum Saba' dalam Q.S. Saba' [34]: 15–17 untuk meminimalisir krisis limbah pangan di Indonesia. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif-kualitatif, dengan sumber primer yang didapatkan dari Al-Qur'an yang merujuk kepada Q.S. Saba' [34]: 15–17, serta didukung dengan ayat-ayat tentang larangan *tabdhīr* (boros), *isrāf* (berlebihan), pemanfaatan kembali sumber daya, dan larangan

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melakukan kerusakan di muka bumi. Selain itu, sumber sekunder penelitian ini mencakup kitab-kitab klasik dan kontemporer, literatur tentang fikih lingkungan, ekoteologi, dan literatur ilmiah mengenai Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) dan fenomena *food waste*. Kebaruan penelitian ini terletak pada upaya mengaitkan TPB dengan nilai Qur'ani sebagai kerangka etis dalam pengelolaan limbah pangan. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa krisis pangan tidak hanya berakar pada persoalan teknis distribusi, tetapi juga pada krisis nilai spiritual. Integrasi ekoteologi dan TPB memperlihatkan bahwa perubahan perilaku masyarakat menuju gaya hidup *zero waste* dapat diperkuat melalui sikap (keyakinan bahwa pemborosan itu salah), norma subjektif (dorongan sosial berbasis dakwah dan komunitas), serta kontrol perilaku (dukungan regulasi dan fasilitas). Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa solusi atas persoalan pangan di Indonesia memerlukan pendekatan teknis sekaligus transformasi spiritual yang bersumber dari nilai Al-Qur'an. Maka dari itu, penelitian ini merekomendasikan pengujian model TPB-Qur'ani melalui survei lapangan atau studi kasus secara langsung untuk mengukur penerapan nilai-nilai ekoteologis Al-Qur'an dalam perubahan perilaku pengelolaan makanan.

Kata-kata Kunci: Al-Qur'an, Ekoteologi, Krisis Limbah Pangan, Tafsir.

Introduction

The phenomenon of food waste has become one of the serious challenges in Indonesia over the past two decades (Martianto et al. 2024, e0305087). Data from the Ministry of Environment and Forestry show that over the last five years, food waste has been the largest contributor to national waste generation, with an ever-increasing trend (Chandra et al. 2024, 9611). This fact is especially ironic given that Indonesia is an agrarian country with enormous food production potential, yet at the same time it is one of the largest contributors of food waste in the world (Taufiqi et al. 2025, 012040). Decomposing waste produces methane gas (CH4), which contributes to the climate crisis and global warming (Rohmadi et al. 2022, 880). Beyond emissions, soil and water pollution caused by food waste also creates ecological imbalances that harm the sustainability of ecosystems around disposal sites (Ma et al. 2022, 130234).

This issue becomes even more complex when viewed from the perspective of social inequality (Cafiero et al. 2018, 147). On one hand, millions of Indonesians still experience food insecurity and struggle to access adequate nutrition. On the other hand, excessive consumption and food wastefulness have become habits legitimized by modern consumerist culture (Diana et al. 2024, 21). This phenomenon confirms that food waste is not merely a technical issue of distribution or waste management but also reflects a far more fundamental crisis of values, namely the loss of sensitivity to the meaning of gratitude, distributive justice, and responsibility toward both fellow human beings and nature (Kusumawardani et al. 2023, 5653).

Studies on food waste have so far focused more on technical (Schanes et al. 2018, 980), economic (Waluyo and Kharisma 2023, 2202938), and infrastructural aspects (Taufiqi et al. 2025, 012040), without touching on the underlying values and spiritual ethics that form the foundation of behavioral change. These approaches are important and have contributed to mitigating food waste problems

but unfortunately have not sufficiently addressed the real root of the problem, namely society's low awareness of consumption values and ethics (Asyari et al. 2023, 840–66). A purely technocratic approach tends to treat humans as rational actors who will automatically change their behavior when given information or economic incentives, whereas in reality, food consumption behavior is closely tied to the values, habits, and beliefs held by individuals and communities alike (Hebrok and Boks 2017, 380–92).

In fact, the majority (87%) of Indonesia's population is Muslim (Hidayat and Darmadi 2019, 201–5), with religious teachings that explicitly emphasize the values of simplicity, gratitude, and ecological responsibility as an inseparable part of faith (Elshaer et al. 2021, 6473). The Qur'an, as the primary source of Islamic teaching, contains many verses that speak of the prohibition of excess (*isrāf*), the prohibition of squandering blessings (*tabdhīr*), and the encouragement to maintain balance (*mīzān*) in the use of natural resources (Syarifuddin and Sakti 2023, 40). Therefore, an approach based on Qur'anic values has the potential to make a significant contribution to shaping more sustainable public behavior, while also complementing the shortcomings of the technocratic approach that has so far dominated the discourse on food waste management in Indonesia (Farahdiba et al. 2023, 103256).

This article offers an integrative framework through the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) combined with Qur'anic values. TPB explains that an individual's behavioral intention is influenced by attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen 2005, 179). In the authors' view, these three factors have a strong conceptual correspondence with Qur'anic values. Attitude toward behavior can be shaped through the internalization of the value of gratitude and the prohibition of *isrāf*; subjective norms can be strengthened through religious preaching (*da'wah*), religious education, and community role-modeling; while behavioral control can be supported by regulation and the provision of facilities that enable communities to practice zero waste in real terms. By integrating this framework into Qur'anic ethics, particularly through a study of Q.S. Saba' [34]: 15–17, this article seeks to affirm that food waste management is not merely a technical problem, but also a spiritual and moral crisis.

It is important to underline that the linkage between TPB and Qur'anic values in this article is not merely a terminological juxtaposition; each TPB variable is deliberately filled through a specific interpretive move. Attitude toward the behavior is operationalized through the internalization of gratitude (*shukr*) and the prohibition of *isrāf* as read in the exegesis of Q.S. Al-'Arāf [7]: 31; subjective norms are operationalized through the communal and *da'wah*-based reinforcement highlighted in the readings of al-Qurṭubī and Quraish Shihab; and perceived behavioral control is operationalized through the regulatory and infrastructural dimension illustrated by the collapse of the Ma'rib Dam in Q.S. Saba' [34]:

15–17. Read in this way, Q.S. Saba' [34]: 15–17 functions in this article as an *'ibrah*. This contextual-hermeneutical analogy draws an ethical lesson from the Qur'anic narrative, rather than a historical claim that the destruction of the Saba' civilization was directly caused by modern-style food waste. This distinction also marks the study's novelty: unlike earlier eco-theological readings of the Qur'an, which generally stop at identifying ecological values within the text, this article systematically operationalizes those values into the three behavioral components of TPB.

The choice of Q.S. Saba' [34]: 15–17 as the main theological basis of this article is not without reason. Classical and contemporary exegetes situate the destruction primarily in *kufr al-ni'mah* (ingratitude toward divine blessing) and in the collapse of collective irrigation governance; the present study draws on that exegetical understanding as an ethical lesson on the consequences of exploiting natural abundance without gratitude and responsible stewardship, a lesson that is then read alongside empirical data on Indonesia's food waste crisis discussed in the following section. This story becomes a highly relevant metaphor for the condition of the modern environmental crisis, in which the exploitation of natural resources without regard for ecological balance leads to disasters that ultimately harm humanity itself (Syakir 2012, 210).

Based on the above explanation, this article aims to explore the role of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) grounded in Qur'anic values in addressing environmental problems in Indonesia. The main question posed is how the Qur'an can provide guidance for food waste management in Indonesia through practical ethical values. This paper proceeds from the assumption that food problems cannot be solved by technical solutions alone but require a spiritual approach that has a strong influence on changes in public behavior.

The significance of this study lies in three aspects. First, academically, this study contributes to the development of thematic exegesis (*tafsīr mawḍū'ī*) studies that specifically link Qur'anic texts to contemporary issues, namely the food waste crisis, a theme that has not been widely explored in the eco-theological exegesis literature in Indonesia (Nazhifah and Karimah 2021, 368–76). Second, theoretically, this study extends the scope of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) by incorporating a spiritual-religious dimension as a variable that strengthens its three main components, something rarely done in behavioral studies based on conventional social psychology theory. Third, practically, this study is expected to provide concrete recommendations for policymakers, religious institutions, and civil society in designing more effective food waste mitigation programs, since it takes into account the dimension of values and beliefs held by Indonesia's majority-Muslim population.

Research on consumer food waste has increasingly relied on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), because the theory offers a compact explanation of why

people who regard wasting food as undesirable nevertheless continue to do so. Ajzen proposed that intention, the immediate antecedent of behavior, is shaped jointly by attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen 1991, 182). A systematic review of household food waste studies that apply the theory concludes that the three components intersect in explaining household behavior, and that a holistic strategy addressing all of them is needed to reduce waste effectively (Etim et al. 2025, 803–27). Literature reviews on the drivers and levers of behavioral change at the household level address the same question from a wider angle (Vittuari et al. 2023, 104–14). Studies of specific consumer groups, such as students in Chinese university canteens (Qian et al. 2021, 105410) and young consumers in a developing country, examine the multiple determinants of food waste. The role of the state has also been studied: Lin and Guan investigate perceived government control as a determinant of household food waste reduction intention in China, a variable that is directly relevant to the perceived behavioral control component discussed in this article (Lin and Guan 2021, 113577).

A growing body of work asks whether religiosity changes the way people handle food. Elhoushy and Jang found that religiosity encourages food waste reduction by shaping personal and pro-environmental norms (Elhoushy and Jang 2021, 290), while Elshaer et al. showed that it discourages waste generation by strengthening subjective norms and attitudes (Elshaer et al. 2021, 6473). Azazz and Elshaer examine religiosity together with social media usage and excessive buying behavior in explaining food waste intention (Azazz and Elshaer 2022, 6786). Comparative studies have produced more differentiated findings. Baran et al., using a survey of 575 respondents in Romania, Italy, and Turkey, find that religiosity raises environmental concern among both Muslims and Christians, but that its effect on the intention to reduce food waste is significant only among Muslims (Baran et al. 2024, 4852). Filimonau et al. study religious values and social distance as activators of norms against wasting food when dining out (Filimonau et al. 2023, 161645). The same research group also treats religious values and family upbringing as antecedents of food waste avoidance (Filimonau, Mika, et al. 2022, 102547).

The evidence is not uniform. In a qualitative study based on interviews with 22 Muslims and four religious leaders, Filimonau et al. report only a limited association between religiosity and wasteless behavior at home and away from home, which suggests that religious teaching does not automatically translate into practice. Indonesian evidence is closer to the context of this article (Filimonau, Kadum, et al. 2022, 797–818). Lubis et al. surveyed 529 Muslim households and found that routine shopping and eating habits increase food waste, whereas awareness, knowledge, religiosity, and religious norms reduce it; they also conclude that these factors are insufficient without regulations addressing unethical consumption (Lubis et al. 2024, 257–75). Asyari et al. study food waste behavioral intention in Islamic universities through the roles of religiosity and pro-social behavior

(Asyari et al. 2023, 840–66). On the normative side, Shompa et al. propose a conceptual framework that harmonizes *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* with sustainable waste management practices (Shompa et al. 2025, 142–65).

A parallel literature examines the ecological ethics of the Qur'an itself. Rahmat reads Qur'anic verses through the concepts of *khalifah* (stewardship), *mīzān* (balance), and *maṣlaḥah* (public interest), and argues that Islamic teaching forbids environmental destruction while stressing balance (Rahmat 2025,110). Mukhlis proposes a thematic-contextual reading of the ecological paradigm in Qur'anic exegesis (Mukhlis 2022, 92). In the Indonesian setting, Fajar reads the interconnection of verses (*munāsabah*) as a moral idea amid the ecological crisis, discuss Fazlur Rahman's view of human responsibility toward nature in relation to the waste crisis (Fajar 2025, 123).

Taken together, these studies leave a gap that the present article addresses. In many of the empirical studies reviewed here, religiosity is a measured variable, usually a single score, and the specific religious teaching that is expected to shape a specific behavioral determinant is seldom spelled out. The eco-theological literature, in contrast, elaborates Qur'anic concepts of stewardship and balance but seldom connects them to a behavioral model that can be operationalized and tested. This article therefore reads Q.S. Saba' [34]: 15–17 as a concrete narrative, extracts the ethical values it carries, and assigns each value to a component of the TPB, so that the Qur'anic text supplies the content of attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control instead of appearing only as a general appeal to religiosity.

This study uses a descriptive qualitative method with a library research approach. This approach was chosen because the main object of study in this research is text, both primary texts in the form of Qur'anic verses and secondary texts in the form of exegetical literature and scholarly studies, requiring an in-depth analysis of the meaning and context of these texts rather than field data collection. The primary source of this study is the Qur'an, specifically Q.S. Saba' [34]: 15–17, supplemented by supporting verses such as Q.S. Al-Isrā' [17]: 26–27 on the prohibition of *tabdhīr*, Q.S. Al-'Arāf [7]: 31 on the prohibition of *isrāf,* Q.S. Al-An'ām [6]: 141 on the principle of reuse, and Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]: 205 on the prohibition of causing earth damage. Unless otherwise indicated, all English translations of Qur'anic verses cited in this article are based on the Sahih International translation.

The secondary sources of this study include classical and contemporary exegetical works, such as *al-Jāmi' li Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* by al-Qurṭubī, *Tafsir al-Misbah* by Quraish Shihab, as well as the works of Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī on environmental jurisprudence (*fiqh al-bī'ah*). In addition, this study also refers to contemporary Ecotheology literature, particularly the thought of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, as well as scientific literature related to the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) developed by

Icek Ajzen, and various journal articles related to the food waste crisis in Indonesia and abroad.

Data collection was carried out through a systematic literature review, tracing relevant keywords such as food waste, Ecotheology, Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), and interpretations of the people of Saba' in national and international scholarly journal databases, as well as reference exegetical works. The collected data were then reduced to obtain information relevant to the research focus, followed by thematic presentation of the data, interpretation based on the eco-theological and TPB approaches, and concluded by drawing conclusions (Darmalaksana 2020, 3).

The analysis proceeded in four steps. First, the verses of Q.S. Saba' [34]: 15–17 were read together with the exegetical accounts of al-Qurṭubī and Quraish Shihab in order to establish the historical setting of the Saba' community and the causes that the exegetes assign to its downfall. Second, the supporting verses on *tabdhīr*, *isrāf*, and *fasad* were gathered thematically (*tafsīr mawḍū'ī*) so that recurring ethical terms could be identified across the primary and the supporting texts. Third, following Fazlur Rahman's double movement, the historical situation of the verses was separated from the principle they convey, and the principle was then carried into the contemporary problem of food waste. Fourth, the resulting values were assigned to the three components of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and compared with empirical findings from the food waste literature, in order to check whether each proposed link is plausible or is contradicted by existing evidence.

Because the article is a text-based study, its validity rests on the transparency of interpretation rather than on statistical inference. The interpretation is therefore anchored in named exegetical sources, the *'ibrah* reading is marked explicitly as an analogy and not as historical causation, and the empirical literature is used only to test the plausibility of the proposed links, not to claim that the model has been verified. Empirical verification is left to future field research.

The Food Waste Crisis in Indonesia

The food waste crisis has now become a serious threat to food security in Indonesia (Baity and Afinnas 2025, 390). This phenomenon can no longer be regarded as a trivial domestic issue, given that food waste consistently constitutes the largest contributor to the volume of waste ending up in landfills (Faidza et al. 2025, 1405–13). This crisis cannot be seen as a problem arising solely from individual failure to manage food waste. Rather, it is the result of an accumulation of failures across several aspects. The main causes of food waste are poor infrastructure, excessive consumption habits, and a lack of public awareness (Suryana et al. 2023, 12). Meanwhile, that a 50% reduction in food waste could feed up to 25 million people, a figure equivalent to the extremely poor population in Indonesia (Zhafarina et al. 2024, 198).

Meanwhile, national regulation still leaves gaps. Law Number 18 of 2008 on

Waste Management does not specifically regulate food waste management. As a result, food waste is often treated the same as ordinary waste and simply ends up in landfills (Pemerintah Pusat 2008; Pramudji and Andiani 2020, 93–102). Some experts propose economic incentive-based regulations to reduce food waste, such as incentive and disincentive systems (Bachmida and Afni 2025, 7079–93). Such schemes, for example, tax relief for businesses that succeed in reducing food waste, or fines for the large-scale disposal of still-edible food, are considered capable of driving faster behavioral change among business actors compared to relying solely on voluntary awareness (Triatmojo 2026, 30).

If projected, should Indonesia in the future succeed in reducing or even halting half (50%) of the current total food waste, the positive impact would not stop merely at reduced waste volume. Further, this step has the potential to save three aspects at once: the social aspect, through improved food access for vulnerable groups; the economic aspect, through more efficient use of national resources; and the environmental aspect, through reduced greenhouse gas emissions (Nurhasanah et al. 2025, 120).

To achieve this, a number of experts propose economic incentive-based regulatory approaches as policy instruments considered more effective than approaches based on mere appeals. The importance of the state is also visible in household-level research: Lin and Guan examine perceived government control as a determinant of household food waste reduction intention in China, a variable that corresponds to the perceived behavioral control component of the TPB (Lin and Guan 2021, 113577). Unfortunately, to date, Indonesia's regulatory framework has not specifically addressed a comprehensive food waste management mechanism, so the potential of such policy instruments has not yet been optimally implemented (Barón et al. 2020, 9011).

Behavioral factors at the household level deserve equal attention. Martianto et al. analyze the quantity and composition of household food waste and draw policy implications (Martianto et al. 2024, e0305087), and Diana et al. examine how household food insecurity is associated with food waste, which shows that scarcity and waste can coexist within the same society (Diana et al. 2024, 21). Research on Indonesian Muslim households points to the role of habit: routine shopping and eating habits increase food waste, while awareness, knowledge, religiosity, and religious norms decrease it (Lubis et al. 2024, 265). The same study warns that these factors cannot compensate for the absence of regulation on unethical consumption on their own. This finding matters for the argument of this article because it indicates that value-based approaches and structural approaches are complements rather than substitutes, which is precisely why the TPB, with its three interacting components, is used here as the organizing framework.

Based on the above discussion, it can be concluded that today's food waste crisis is not merely a technical problem centered on individual behavior but

rather represents a systemic failure to manage food waste holistically and in an integrated manner spanning infrastructure, collective awareness, and the regulatory framework. Allowing this problem to continue unresolved without concrete policy intervention is, in essence, tantamount to sacrificing future generations' right to a clean-living environment, an efficient economy, and a just food system (Jegalus 2021, 199–217). This is in line with the mandate explicitly stated in Supreme Court Decision Number 1 of 2023, which explicitly states the goal of realizing environmental justice and climate justice for present and future generations (Mahkamah Agung 2023).

Eco-theological Interpretation of the Story of the People of Saba' (Q.S. Saba' [34]: 15–17)

Food wastefulness is not merely a modern phenomenon, but an old problem that has long received attention in Islam's sacred text. Q.S. Saba' [34]: 15–17 is used as the main foundation of this article.

لَقَدْ كَانَ لِسَبَاٍ فِيْ مَسْكَنِهِمْ اٰيَةٌۚ جَنَّتٰنِ عَنْ يَّمِيْنٍ وَّشِمَالٍۗ ۝١٥ كُلُوْا مِنْ رِّزْقِ رَبِّكُمْ وَاشْكُرُوْا لَهٗۗ بَلْدَةٌ
طَيِّبَةٌ وَّرَبٌّ غَفُوْرٌ فَاَعْرَضُوْا فَاَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ سَيْلَ الْعَرِمِ وَبَدَّلْنٰهُمْ بِجَنَّتَيْهِمْ جَنَّتَيْنِ ذَوَاتَيْ اُكُلٍ
خَمْطٍ وَّاَثْلٍ وَّشَيْءٍ مِّنْ سِدْرٍ قَلِيْلٍ ذٰلِكَ جَزَيْنٰهُمْ بِمَا كَفَرُوْاۗ وَهَلْ نُجٰزِيْٓ اِلَّا الْكَفُوْرَ

"There was for [the tribe of] Saba' in their dwelling place a sign: two [fields of] gardens on the right and on the left. [They were told], Eat from the provisions of your Lord and be grateful to Him. A good land [have you], and a forgiving Lord. But they turned away [refusing], so We sent upon them the flood of the dam, and We replaced their two [fields of] gardens with gardens of bitter fruit, tamarisks and something of sparse lote trees. [By] that We repaid them because they disbelieved. And do We [thus] repay except the ungrateful?"

Historically, the people of Saba' were known as a civilization settled in the region of southern Yemen with an advanced agricultural system, supported by a great dam known as the Ma'rib Dam. This dam functioned as an irrigation system that transformed an arid region of the southern Arabian Peninsula into a fertile area, producing lush gardens on the right and left of their settlement, as depicted in the verse above. This prosperity made the people of Saba' one of the most prosperous civilizations of their time, with trade routes connecting various regions—so much so that, according to tradition, travel from one city to another could be undertaken without carrying provisions, owing to the abundance available along the way (Hawari et al. 2019, 290).

However, this abundant prosperity instead gave rise to negligence and a turning away from gratitude. Rather than maintaining the sustainability of the irrigation system and making wise use of the abundant resources, the people of Saba' fell into arrogance and wastefulness. As a consequence, the dam that had been the backbone of their prosperity collapsed, causing *Sayl al-'Arim,* a great flood that

destroyed the irrigation system and turned fertile land into a barren region that produced only bitter fruit (*khamṭ*), tamarisk trees, and a few lote trees (Hawari et al. 2019, 295). Many exegetes understand this story not merely as a historical record but as a moral lesson (*'ibrah*) on the cause-and-effect relationship between human attitudes toward nature and the ecological consequences that result (Fajar 2025, 122).

Al-Qurṭubī, in *al-Jāmi' li Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, explains through a historical-philological approach that this destruction began with the denial of God's blessing. Al-Qurṭubī focuses on the aspect of the consequences of individual sin (Qurṭubī 1964, 45). The historical-philological approach used by al-Qurṭubī emphasizes the importance of understanding the socio-economic context of the people of Saba' as an agrarian society heavily dependent on a collective irrigation system, such that negligence in maintaining that system. Which in modern terms can be equated with the mismanagement of common-pool resources, becomes a determining factor in their downfall (Tu et al. 2023, 143).

Unlike al-Qurṭubī, Quraish Shihab interprets this verse through a contextual-ecological approach. According to him, in *Tafsir al-Misbah*, the Ma'rib Dam became a symbol of sustainable environmental management. However, this abundance was not used well; the people of Saba' chose disbelief (*kufr*) in the sense of exploiting natural resources through wastefulness. Ultimately, a great flood occurred as a critique of this pattern of behavior (Shihab 2002, 55). Quraish Shihab's interpretation is important because it shifts the focus from merely individual sin toward a structural critique of unsustainable patterns of collective resource management, a perspective highly relevant to the context of the contemporary food waste crisis, which is likewise structural and systemic in nature.

Meanwhile, Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī holds the view that food wastefulness in the modern era is a repetition of the mistake of Saba' (Qaraḍāwī 2002, 55). The story of the wastefulness of the people of Saba' is relevant to conditions today. Both lived amid an abundance of natural resources, yet both fell into excessive exploitation. The natural disasters now occurring in various regions seem to serve as a warning. If this behavior is allowed to continue, nature may grow wrathful and destroy those who damage it.

Using Fazlur Rahman's approach with Double Movement, Q.S. Saba' [34]: 15–17 tells the story of the historical downfall of the Saba' kingdom through the collapse of the Ma'rib Dam (*Sayl al-'Arim*) (Rahman 2017, 7). This story offers a spiritual analogy that connects with today's ecological crises, including the growing issue of food waste. In this liberating reading, the Qur'an's focus on our responsibility in managing and caring for blessings aligns with modern ecological understanding of carrying capacity: overusing or neglecting a system beyond its regenerative limits leads to negative consequences.

The prohibition against extravagance in Q.S. Al-Isrā' [17]: 26–27 states: *"And*

give the relative his due, as well as the needy and the traveler; and do not squander [your wealth] wastefully. Indeed, the wasteful are brothers of the devils, and Satan is ever ungrateful to his God." This verse conveys a highly relevant message. Linguistically, the term *tabdhīr* (extravagance) is directly linked to the behavior of Satan, who is depicted in the Qur'an as a being that is ungrateful for God's blessings.

According to the accounts of Ibn 'Abbās and Qatadah, this verse was revealed as a critique of the practice of *tabdhīr* (wastefulness) among the pre-Islamic (Jāhiliyyah) society, marked by excessive consumption, revelry, and the exploitation of resources without ecological consideration. Al-Qurṭubī explains that *tabdhīr* here means squandering wealth without a lawful (*shar'ī*) purpose, even for something permissible (such as wasting food) (Qurṭubī 1964, 78). This behavior is deemed forbidden (*ḥarām*) because it damages both the economic and ecological order, and its perpetrators are interpreted as 'brothers of the devils' for emulating the trait of ingratitude toward Allah's blessings.

It is important to note that scholars distinguish between *isrāf* and *tabdhīr*, although both are equally condemned. *Isrāf* is generally understood as excess in something that is inherently permissible, whereas *tabdhīr* more specifically refers to the expenditure or use of resources without a proper purpose (*ghayr mahall*), including wasting food that is still fit for consumption. This conceptual distinction is important for understanding that the Qur'an's prohibitions cover a broad spectrum from excessive behavior in consumption to the concrete act of squandering food resources.

The narrative of Saba' opens with a command that joins consumption and gratitude: *"Eat from the provisions of your Lord and be grateful to Him"* (Q.S. Saba' [34]: 15). The two verbs are placed side by side, so enjoyment of provision is not condemned in itself; what the text condemns is the turning away (*i'rād*) that follows enjoyment. The Qur'an states the same logic in general terms in Q.S. Ibrāhīm [14]: 7, where gratitude is linked to an increase of blessing. Read together, the two texts imply that gratitude is not merely an inner feeling but a mode of handling provision, which includes recognizing its source, taking only what is needed, and not letting it spoil. The failure attributed to the people of Saba' can thus be read as a failure of this mode of handling, of which wastefulness is one visible symptom.

The consequence described in Q.S. Saba' [34]: 16 is ecological in form: fertile gardens are replaced by gardens of bitter fruit, tamarisk, and sparse lote trees, so the land loses its productive capacity. Other verses describe the human role in such damage in general terms. Q.S. Al-'Arāf [7]: 56 forbids causing corruption on the earth after it has been set in order, and Q.S. Ar-Rūm [30]: 41 states that corruption has appeared on land and sea because of what people's hands have earned. Placed beside Saba', these verses suggest that the Qur'an treats ecological damage as a moral

consequence of human conduct and not merely as a natural accident. For the argument of this article, the important point is that the text links three things: the abundance of provision, the manner in which people handle it, and the durability of the ecosystem that produces it. Food waste sits at the junction of these three.

Because the article draws a lesson rather than a historical equation, it is necessary to state how the analogy is controlled. In the first movement of Rahman's method, the verses are understood in their historical setting: an agrarian society whose prosperity depended on a shared irrigation structure. In the second movement, the general principle is extracted: prosperity that is not matched by gratitude and by the maintenance of shared systems becomes fragile. This principle, not the historical event itself, is applied to the modern food system, in which households, businesses, and the state share responsibility for a chain that runs from farm to landfill. The analogy therefore does not claim that food waste destroyed Saba', nor that a flood is a predictable punishment for modern consumers; it claims that the ethical structure of the narrative, namely gratitude, restraint, and collective maintenance, offers a usable standard for evaluating how food is produced, distributed, and discarded today.

Eco-theological Interpretive Analysis for Minimizing Food Waste in Indonesia

Based on the discussion above, three main eco-theological values relevant to addressing the contemporary food waste crisis can be synthesized from the story of the people of Saba'. First, the value of gratitude, which requires humans to recognize and appreciate the blessings bestowed upon them rather than squandering them. Second, the value of balance (*mīzān*), which requires humans to manage natural resources according to their regenerative capacity rather than exploiting them excessively. Third, the value of collective responsibility (mas'uliyyah jama'iyyah), which requires humans to maintain the systems and infrastructure that support shared life, just as the people of Saba' should have maintained the Ma'rib Dam as a collective facility supporting their prosperity.

The interpretation of the verses above aligns with the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which explains that changes in human behavior must be grounded in three main factors: attitude toward behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen 2005, 4). This is in line with Seyyed Hossein Nasr, who asserts that the ecological crisis afflicting the world today is not merely a technical problem or managerial error, but is rooted in a deeper spiritual crisis. This crisis arises from the collapse of values and social ethics that ought to form the foundation of humanity's relationship with nature. As spiritual awareness and moral responsibility toward the environment are increasingly abandoned, damage becomes inevitable (Nasr 2021, 60).

Based on Qur'anic values, the authors propose an innovative solution in the

form of a Qur'anic-perspective Zero Waste Movement. This movement does not merely adopt the conventional 3R principle (reduce, reuse, recycle), but also integrates it with the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and a spiritual approach grounded in the Qur'an. This solution arises from the awareness that every human action toward the environment carries a dimension of worship and responsibility before Allah.

The principle of reducing (reduce) finds strong grounding in Q.S. Al-'Arāf [7]: 31, which prohibits all forms of excess. Al-Qurṭubī, in his exegesis, asserts that this verse is not merely a prohibition against wasting wealth, but also a warning that humans should not consume resources beyond their actual needs (Qurṭubī 1964, 102). Meanwhile, avoiding excess covers all aspects of life, including consumption patterns that have the potential to create piles of waste (Syakir 2012, 340).

In practical terms, the principle can be implemented through more mature food consumption planning, both at the household and industrial levels. Households can apply this principle through need-based shopping planning, proper storage of food ingredients to extend shelf life, and portion sizes adjusted to the consumption capacity of family members. At the industrial level, the reduced principle can be applied through improved supply chain management, more accurate demand forecasting, and more flexible product aesthetic standards, so that food products that are visually imperfect but still fit for consumption are not automatically discarded.

Meanwhile, for the principle of reuse, Q.S. Al-An'ām [6]: 141 provides guidance on the importance of using items repeatedly. The prohibition of excess in this verse includes the practice of discarding items that still have use value (Handoko 2023, 88). This aligns with the Prophet's hadith concerning the repair of sandals, which, according to Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī in *Ri'āyat al-Bī'ah fī Sharī'at al-Islām*, constitutes a concrete example of the sunnah of reuse taught by Islam (Qaraḍāwī 2001, 45).

In the context of food waste, the reuse principle can be realized through the reuse of surplus food ingredients into derivative products that still hold consumption value, for example, processing leftover vegetables into stock, turning bread nearing its expiration date into bread pudding, or distributing surplus food from events to those in need through a food rescue scheme. Such practices not only reduce the volume of food waste but also align with the spirit of efficiency and appreciation for the blessing of food taught by the Qur'an.

The principle of recycling (recycle) derives its legitimacy from Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]: 205, concerning the prohibition against causing earth damage. Al-Ṭabarī, in his exegesis, emphasizes that environmental damage is among the acts detested by Allah (Thabari 2022, 120). Meanwhile, this verse is to humanity's responsibility to manage resources wisely, including reprocessing used materials into something of value (Hakim and Munawir 2020, 53).

In practice, the recycling principle for food waste can be realized through processing food scraps into compost for organic farming, processing into animal feed, or converting it into biogas as an alternative energy source. Such a recycling process transforms food waste, once regarded merely as an environmental burden, into a productive resource, while also reducing dependence on synthetic chemicals and fossil energy sources.

This movement adopts a unique approach by combining the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) with Qur'anic values. As explained by Quraish Shihab, environmental awareness in Islam must be built upon three foundations: belief in accountability in the hereafter (*ukhrāwī*), awareness of the harmony of nature (*kawniyyah*), and the understanding that the earth is a trust (*amānah*) (Shihab 2002, 52). Through the integration of classical and contemporary exegesis, this movement offers not only practical waste-management solutions but also a spiritual transformation in how humans view their relationship with the environment. As al-Ghazālī conveys in *Iḥyā' 'Ulūmuddīn*, every grain of food that is wasted constitutes a denial of Allah's blessing, while every effort to reuse resources is a genuine act of gratitude (Ghazali 2008, 210).

The Qur'anic-perspective Zero Waste Movement presents itself as an answer to the environmental crisis rooted in the spiritual crisis of the modern era, inviting humans to return to balance (*mīzān*) as taught in Islam. This movement encompasses five main strategies:

First, food waste management. This can be applied through steps such as processing food waste into productive materials like animal feed, compost for organic farming, and biogas (Wislim et al. 2025, 165). Food waste that was once merely a pile of worthless refuse can now become an alternative for communities to reduce their dependence on chemicals and fossil energy sources.

Second, educating consumers and producers. This aligns with the message contained in Q.S. Al-'Aṣr [103]: 3: *"Indeed, mankind is in loss, except for those who believe, do righteous deeds, and advise one another to truth."* Consumers are encouraged to buy food in moderate portions and to consume it until it is all gone. In addition, zero-waste campaigns such as clean plates in restaurants, eateries, and hotels should be promoted. Although they may seem small, major changes often begin with small steps. This means that these measures are far more effective than simply relying on one another (Irawan 2022, 4).

Third, specific regulations on food waste. This step aligns with Q.S. Al-Ḥadīd [57]: 25. As a nation governed by the rule of law, Indonesia holds that the guiding principle in societal dynamics is the law, not politics or the economy. This means the zero-waste movement will not have a significant impact unless regulations on zero waste are established as the legal framework for this movement. Although regulations on waste management already exist, specific regulations regarding food waste are still lacking. There is a legal vacuum that prevents this issue from being

resolved. There need to be limits on food waste and incentives for communities that have successfully achieved zero waste.

This step has in fact already been taken by South Korea and has proven successful. Regulations such as mandatory food waste recycling, pay-as-you-throw policies, and a ban on dumping waste into the sea have been implemented. The 90% food waste recycled figure in this article refers to the separation and collection rate (effectively separated and collected), not the final recycling rate (Lee et al. 2024, 854).

This Zero Waste Movement can only succeed if the elements above can work well together. Although this is not easy, through the guidance of the Qur'an, society and government can learn to become better. With awareness and shared commitment, it is hoped that food waste, currently just a pile of refuse, can become something valuable and beneficial. In addition, this movement is expected to help address the problem of hunger that has yet to be fully resolved.

The solid theological foundation in Sūrah Saba' traces how wastefulness destroyed a civilization. Meanwhile, to understand the limits of consumption ethics, one may turn to Q.S. Al-Isrā' [17]: 26–27. Past events that became a dark chapter in history due to wastefulness serve as an initial awareness in applying ethical and ecological limits. Simply being frugal is not enough, especially in resolving the food waste problem. Concrete, systematic steps are needed for this goal to truly be achieved.

This verse provides a holistic explanation of both the root of the problem and the solution offered. As a theological foundation, it guides us to revive the principle of simple living, avoid wastefulness, and distribute still-edible food to our vulnerable brothers and sisters. This is not merely charity, but also a concrete effort to build social justice and ecological responsibility.

Viewed from the perspective of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), the Zero Waste Movement is not merely a technical step in waste management, but a spiritual movement encompassing fundamental dimensions of life. Through the ecological pathway, the Zero Waste Movement seeks to prevent environmental damage through concrete solutions such as the development of waste banks, the use of biogas, and environmentally friendly recycling technology. Through the educational pathway, this movement aims to build collective public awareness, not merely through slogans, but through applied training that fosters real skills. The regulatory pathway is equally important to create a binding system that ensures the spirit of zero waste is not merely a personal choice, but a social obligation (Etim et al. 2025, 803–27).

Furthermore, the spiritual approach within this movement functions as moral support, instilling fear of the negative consequences of destructive behavior while also sparking motivation to do good for the environment and future generations.

Finally, the digital approach opens new space for this movement to grow massively, harnessing the virality of social media as a means of broader ecological outreach (*da'wah*).

Through this spirit, the noble ideal of building a just and prosperous society blessed by Allah becomes more achievable. It is not merely a utopian fantasy, but a vision that can be reached through firm conviction, a movement grounded in scholarly work, and effective implementation on the ground. This is the task of our civilization: to re-weave the relationship between humans, nature, and the Creator, for a more just and sustainable future.

The zero-waste movement must be made into a cultural movement that permeates the very fabric of society. Within the family environment, the principle of zero waste can be realized through early education for children on the importance of valuing food and managing waste wisely. At the community level, waste bank programs, social kitchens that manage surplus food, and training in organic waste processing can become concrete manifestations of this spirit. At the policy level, the government and religious institutions can work together to create regulations aligned with eco-theological values, so that this movement becomes not merely a passing trend but transforms into a way of life for the nation—a civilization that no longer exploits but instead cares for and honors the earth as a trust.

Comparison with Previous Studies and Implications

Compared with the empirical studies reviewed above, the reading proposed here makes three points. First, it agrees with studies that find religiosity to be a meaningful factor among Muslims (Elhoushy and Jang 2021, 287–302; Elshaer et al. 2021, 6473; Baran et al. 2024, 4852; Lubis et al. 2024, 257–75), and it offers a textual explanation of why: the Qur'an explicitly connects provision, gratitude, and restraint. Second, it helps to explain why the same body of literature also reports weak or conditional effects (Filimonau, Kadum, et al. 2022, 802). If religiosity is measured as a general level of piety, it may capture attitude only weakly and say little about norms and control. A framework that specifies which Qur'anic value corresponds to which behavioral determinant can guide more precise measurement, for example by asking respondents whether they see leftover food as a lapse in gratitude, whether their mosque or community discourages waste, and whether they have access to facilities for storing, sharing, or composting food. Third, it locates the limits of a value-based approach. Lubis et al. conclude that awareness and religiosity alone cannot substitute for regulation, and the analysis of Saba' points the same way, since the collapse of a shared structure cannot be prevented by private piety alone (Lubis et al. 2024, 265).

Three practical implications follow. For religious institutions, sermons, Qur'anic study groups, and Islamic schools can treat food waste as a matter of gratitude and stewardship, using the narrative of Saba' together with Q.S. Al-Isrā' [17]: 26–27

and Q.S. Al-'Arāf [7]: 31 as teaching material. For policymakers, Law Number 18 of 2008 does not establish a specific category or a mandatory obligation for food waste (Pemerintah Pusat 2008; Satyawati et al. 2024, 52–71). This leaves the perceived behavioral control component without institutional support (Satyawati et al. 2024, 60), and the South Korean experience discussed above (Lee et al. 2024, 854) illustrates how collection and recycling rules can be designed. For civil society, waste banks, food banks, and community kitchens can supply the practical channels through which households redistribute or process surplus food, and they can be framed in the language of *zakah*, *ṣadaqah*, and *amānah*, so that participation is understood as worship and not only as environmental volunteering.

Two limitations should be kept in view. The study is interpretive, and the mapping between Qur'anic values and TPB components is a proposal and not a measured relationship; other exegetes might assign the values differently. In addition, most of the empirical findings cited here come from specific populations, such as students, restaurant clientele, or households in particular countries, so they support plausibility rather than generalization. A survey of Indonesian Muslim households that measures the three TPB components with items derived from the values discussed here would be the natural next step.

Conclusion

This study has shown that Q.S. Saba' [34]: 15–17 can be read, through a contextual-hermeneutical lens, as an *'ibrah* for the food waste crisis in Indonesia—not as a literal historical explanation of the Saba' civilization's collapse, but as an ethical framework linking gratitude, balance (*mīzān*), and collective responsibility to the three components of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). Taken together, these two frameworks suggest that a durable reduction of food waste requires more than technical or economic instruments: it requires attitudes shaped by religious values, subjective norms reinforced through *da'wah* and communal example, and perceived behavioral control strengthened by regulation and supporting infrastructure. Beyond its conceptual contribution to eco-theological tafsir and to the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), this study points toward concrete steps for religious institutions, policymakers, and civil society, namely integrating Qur'anic environmental ethics into religious education and *da'wah* materials, and formulating the specific food waste regulation still absent from Indonesia's current legal framework. This study is limited to a qualitative, text-based analysis and does not empirically test the proposed TPB-Qur'anic model; future research could examine the model's applicability through field surveys or case studies of zero waste communities, to verify whether the eco-theological values identified here in fact translate into measurable behavioral change.

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