



Brebes trade: A SOAR-driven approach to enhancing competitiveness and growth

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ABSTRACT

The trade sector in Brebes Regency, Indonesia, exhibits a unique landscape with a strong focus on agriculture and local markets, presenting challenges in achieving significant growth. This study aims to analyze the trade sector in Brebes using the SOAR framework to identify key areas for development. The research methodology involved assessing the strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and potential results of the trade sector in Brebes. The analysis revealed that while wholesale and retail trade dominate the sector with a contribution of 85.63%, motor vehicle and motorcycle trade lag behind at 14.37%. Despite slow projected growth, strategic innovations in infrastructure, logistics, and competitiveness have the potential to drive significant expansion in the trade sector. By leveraging the county's agricultural base, strategic location, and emerging opportunities such as e-commerce and government support for MSMEs, Brebes can enhance its trade sector's competitiveness and economic contribution. The study underscores the importance of strategic planning and innovative initiatives to propel the trade sector in Brebes towards a more vibrant and prosperous future.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Economic growth is a fundamental concept in macroeconomics, referring to the increase in the value of goods and services produced by an economy over a period of time (Febrayanto, 2023). It is typically measured as the percentage change in real gross domestic product (GDP), which is adjusted for inflation (Engla Desnim Silvia et al., 2013). Economic growth is often considered a key indicator of a country's prosperity and well-being, as it leads to higher living standards, increased employment opportunities, and improved public services (Hambarsari & Inggit, 2016).

Indonesia's economy has experienced significant growth in recent decades, driven by a combination of factors such as a large and growing population, abundant natural resources, and a burgeoning middle class (Azulaidin, 2021). This growth has been evident in various sectors, including manufacturing, services, and agriculture (Ramadani, 2019). However, despite this progress, regional disparities persist, with some areas lagging behind in development. In Central Java, for instance, economic growth has been driven primarily by agriculture and manufacturing, but challenges remain in terms of infrastructure development, human capital development, and attracting foreign investment (Larasati et al., 2024). Despite these challenges, Central Java holds significant potential for future economic growth, particularly in sectors like tourism, technology, and renewable energy.

Brebes Regency is known for its agricultural prowess, with rice, onions, and chili being major crops. This sector plays a significant role in the county's economic growth, providing employment and contributing to the local economy. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) of Brebes, agriculture accounted for approximately 30% of the county's Gross Domestic Regional Product (GRDP) in 2023. The abundance of fertile land and a skilled workforce in agriculture contribute to the sector's prominence in the county's economy (BPS, 2024).

Agriculture is a prominent sector in Brebes Regency, with its fertile land making it a significant agriculture commodities producer in Central Java. The growth of the agricultural sector in Brebes has been consistently higher than the average for other districts in the province, driven by several key factors (Febrayanto & Susiyanti, 2024). These include the abundance of fertile land and favorable climate, the expertise of farmers, government support through programs and subsidies, and access to local, regional, and national markets. The combination of these factors has made agriculture the backbone of Brebes' economy, contributing significantly to economic growth and the well-being of its residents (Permadi et al., 2023).

Beyond agriculture, the trade and manufacturing sectors also play crucial roles in Brebes' economic landscape (Febrayanto & Kurniasih, 2022). The county's strategic location, near major transportation routes and urban centers, has facilitated the growth of trade and commerce. The manufacturing sector, particularly food processing and textiles, has also seen considerable growth in recent years, driven by the availability of raw materials from the agricultural sector and a growing demand for processed goods. These sectors contribute significantly to Brebes' GRDP, creating jobs and driving economic activity in the region (Baperlitbangda Brebes Regency, 2023a).

In tandem with the thriving agricultural sector, Brebes Regency has witnessed a robust growth in its manufacturing industry, particularly in food processing. This growth is driven by the availability of abundant raw materials from the agricultural sector, creating a strong foundation for value addition and diversification of the local economy. The county's strategic location, near major transportation routes and urban centers, also facilitates the movement of goods and services, further boosting the manufacturing sector (Baperlitbangda Brebes Regency, 2023b).

According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) of Brebes, the manufacturing sector contributed significantly to the county's Gross Domestic Regional Product (GRDP), accounting for approximately 15% in 2023 (BPS, 2024). This growth is attributed to the increasing demand for processed food products, both locally and nationally. Key industries include food processing, particularly for agricultural commodities like rice, shallots, corn, and chili, as well as textile manufacturing (Febrayanto & Susiyanti, 2023). This growth has created employment opportunities and contributed to the overall economic development of Brebes Regency.

Despite the robust growth in agriculture and manufacturing sectors in Brebes Regency, the trade sector, particularly wholesale and retail, has experienced a slower pace of development compared to Central Java Province (has growth rate: 3,07) (Rizki et al., 2021). This disparity is particularly concerning given the county's growing population and rising per capita income, which would typically lead to increased demand for goods and services (A. Mahendra, 2017). The growth in the trade sector has not kept pace with these demographic and economic shifts, suggesting underlying challenges that require attention. If the trade sector is not improved, the potential impacts include a decline in economic growth, increasing levels of unemployment and reducing regional income. In addition, in the long term it will make a region less competitive in national and international markets, job opportunities and income will decrease (Mesrania & Hidayah, 2023).

The disparity between the slow growth of the trade sector and the increasing population and per capita income in Brebes Regency necessitates a comprehensive study to identify the specific factors hindering the growth of the wholesale and retail trade sectors (Sari, 2022). While numerous studies have focused on identifying and classifying the key economic sectors in Brebes Regency, particularly highlighting the dominance of agriculture and manufacturing, research on the factors hindering the growth of the trade sector (Ikhsani, 2016; Khatimah & Mudmainnah, 2022; Mardiyanti et al., 2023; Ningsih et al., 2016; Rahmawati, 2023; Saputra, 2021), especially wholesale and retail,

remains limited. This gap in knowledge underscores the need for dedicated research to understand the specific challenges faced by this sector and develop effective solutions to stimulate its growth. A comprehensive study focusing on the trade sector's slow development would provide valuable insights into the underlying causes and offer actionable recommendations for policymakers and businesses.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research was conducted in August-September 2024 in Brebes Regency. This research uses primary data and secondary data. Primary data will be collected through interviews with key stakeholders, while secondary data will be sourced from BPS Brebes Regency, including GRDP data. This research uses a mixed method approach, namely combining quantitative and qualitative paradigms. This mixed method will provide a comprehensive understanding of the trade sector in Brebes Regency, identifying quantitative trends and qualitative insights, which ultimately contribute to the development of effective strategies to drive its growth.

The quantitative paradigm utilizes linear regression analysis to project the future growth of the trade sector, leveraging data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) of Brebes. This analysis will provide insights into the projected trajectory of the sector and identify potential trends.

The qualitative component is through in-depth interviews conducted using purposive sampling, with staff from the Economic Development and Infrastructure Division of the Regional Development Planning, Research, and Development Agency of Brebes Regency. Informant can providing valuable insights into the challenges and potential solutions from a local perspective. a qualitative approach is employed to delve deeper into the factors hindering the growth of the trade sector. This approach will utilize the Strength, Opportunity, Aspiration, and Result (SOAR) framework to identify key strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and potential results for the trade sector. SOAR is a strategic planning framework that offers a positive and future-oriented alternative to the traditional SWOT analysis. Instead of focusing on weaknesses and threats, SOAR emphasizes building upon strengths and capitalizing on opportunities to achieve desired outcomes. It encourages a collaborative approach, involving all stakeholders in the planning process to identify the organization's existing capabilities, resources, and advantages, explore external factors that can be leveraged for growth, define the desired future state and long-term ambitions, and outline measurable results. This framework fosters a positive mindset, encourages a collaborative approach, and is future-oriented, making it a powerful tool for organizations seeking to achieve their goals and create a more successful future (Zamlita, 2020).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) of Central Java, the trade sector in Central Java exhibits several key trends. The sector is a significant contributor to the province's Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP), indicating its crucial role in the Central Java economy. Furthermore, Central Java's economy experienced positive growth of 5.04% year-on-year (YoY) in the first quarter of 2023, suggesting a likely positive influence from the trade sector. BPS data also reveals that the trade sector is a major employer in Central Java, having absorbed 94,000 workers between August 2021 and August 2022, making it the second-largest employment sector after agriculture (Rinardi et al., 2019). While the BPS data provides a general overview of the trade sector in Central Java, a more in-depth understanding can be gained by conducting further analysis using more specific BPS data. For example, analyzing GRDP data by industry can reveal the specific contributions of wholesale and retail trade to Central Java's GRDP. Analyzing inter-regional trade data can also shed light on trade trends within Central Java. By conducting more in-depth analysis, a more comprehensive understanding of the trade sector in Central Java can be achieved, identifying the sector's potential and challenges (Nurlaeli et al., 2021).

While the trade sector in Central Java plays a vital role as the second-largest contributor to the province's GRDP after agriculture, the situation in Brebes Regency presents a different picture.

The trade sector in Brebes has not kept pace with the provincial trend, exhibiting slow growth and a relatively low contribution to the county's overall economy. This disparity highlights the unique challenges faced by the trade sector in Brebes, which may be attributed to factors like limited infrastructure, a lack of access to finance, and a less diversified economic base compared to the province as a whole.

Within the trade sector in Brebes, the largest component is wholesale and retail trade, reflecting the county's reliance on local markets and the distribution of agricultural products. However, the contribution of motor vehicle and motorcycle trade is relatively small, indicating a less developed automotive sector compared to other parts of Central Java. This suggests that Brebes' trade sector may be more focused on traditional, local markets and less involved in the broader automotive industry, which is a significant contributor to the provincial economy (Febrayanto & Susiyanti, 2024).

The slow growth of the trade sector in Brebes presents a challenge for the county's economic development. To foster growth, Brebes needs to address the specific factors hindering the trade sector's expansion. This could involve improving infrastructure, providing access to finance for businesses, and encouraging the development of a more diversified trade sector that includes a greater focus on the automotive industry. By addressing these challenges, Brebes can unlock the potential of its trade sector and contribute to the overall economic prosperity of the county (Table 1).

Table 1. Klassen typology of field sectors in Brebes Regency

	$gi \geq g$	$gi \leq g$
$si \geq s$	Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing Accommodation and Food Service Activities Education Services	Wholesale and Retail Trade; Repair of Motor Vehicles and Motorcycles Transportation and Storage Manufacturing Other Services Construction
$si \leq s$	Mining and Quarrying Electricity, Gas, Steam and Air Conditioning Supply Water Supply; Sewerage, Waste Management and Remediation Activities Financial and Insurance Activities Professional, Scientific and Technical Activities	Information and Communication Real Estate Public Administration and Defence; Compulsory Social Security Health and Social Work Activities

The trade sector in Brebes Regency is characterized by a significant dominance of wholesale and retail trade, highlighting the county's reliance on local markets and the distribution of agricultural products. Data reveals that wholesale and retail trade contribute a substantial 85.63% to the overall trade sector, while motor vehicle and motorcycle trade constitute a significantly smaller portion, accounting for only 14.37%. This disparity underscores the distinct nature of the trade sector in Brebes, with a strong emphasis on traditional, local markets and a less developed automotive industry compared to other parts of Central Java (Table 2).

The prominence of wholesale and retail trade in Brebes is likely driven by the county's agricultural abundance. Brebes is known for its agricultural products, including onions, garlic, and various fruits and vegetables. These products are often traded locally, with wholesale markets and retail outlets playing a crucial role in distributing them to consumers within Brebes and surrounding areas. This reliance on agricultural products shapes the trade sector, emphasizing the distribution of locally produced goods rather than manufactured products or automotive services.

The limited contribution of motor vehicle and motorcycle trade suggests a less developed automotive sector in Brebes. This could be attributed to several factors, including a lower per capita income compared to other parts of Central Java, a less developed road infrastructure, and limited

demand for new vehicles. The focus on agriculture and local markets may also contribute to the relatively smaller role of the automotive sector in Brebes' economy.

The dominance of wholesale and retail trade, coupled with the smaller contribution of motor vehicle and motorcycle trade, creates a unique profile for the trade sector in Brebes. This profile reflects the county's agricultural focus and its reliance on local markets. While this structure presents opportunities for growth in the distribution of agricultural products, it also highlights the need for diversification and development in other sectors, including the automotive industry, to foster broader economic growth and create a more balanced trade sector.

Table 2. Components contribution of trade sector

Field of Work	Percentage				
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Trade in automobiles, motorcycles, and their repair	14.57	14.52	13.81	14.84	14.37
Wholesale and retail trade	85.43	85.48	86.19	85.16	85.63

While the trade sector in Brebes Regency is projected to experience growth in the coming years, the projected increase is modest, indicating a need for strategic interventions to accelerate its development. Current projections suggest a gradual rise in the trade sector's contribution to the county's economy, reaching a certain level by 2025. However, this projected growth remains relatively low, highlighting the need for proactive measures to stimulate a more robust expansion (Figure 1).

The slow projected growth can be attributed to several factors, including the existing structure of the trade sector, which is heavily reliant on agricultural products and local markets. While this provides a stable foundation, it limits the potential for rapid growth in sectors like automotive trade, which require a more diversified economy and greater investment (Astuti et al., 2017). Furthermore, Brebes may face challenges in attracting investment and developing the infrastructure necessary to support a more dynamic trade sector.

However, the potential for significant growth in the trade sector remains, particularly if innovative development strategies are implemented. By embracing new technologies, fostering entrepreneurship, and promoting diversification, Brebes can unlock its trade sector's full potential. This could involve initiatives like promoting e-commerce platforms to connect local businesses with wider markets, supporting the development of logistics and transportation infrastructure, and encouraging investment in the automotive sector (Dewi et al., 2018).

By embracing innovation and strategic development, Brebes can transform its trade sector from a slow-growing, agricultural-focused model to a more dynamic and diversified engine of economic growth (Saputra, 2021). This transformation would require a collaborative effort between the government, businesses, and local communities to create an environment that fosters innovation, attracts investment, and unlocks the full potential of the trade sector in Brebes.

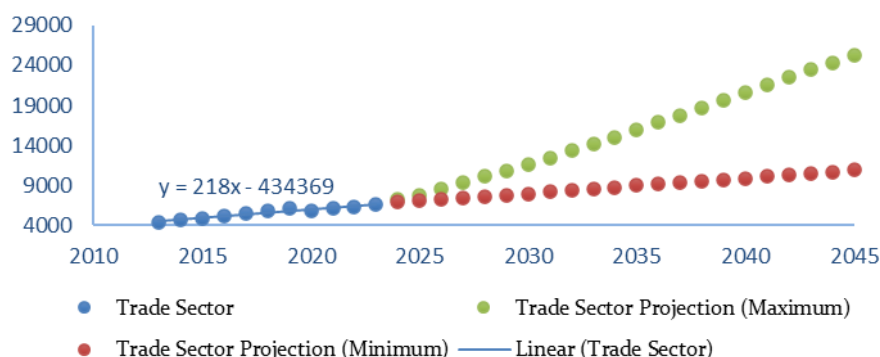


Figure 1. Projection of trade sector values

To effectively guide the development of the trade sector in Brebes Regency, a comprehensive strategy is needed that considers the unique strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and potential results. A robust framework for analyzing these factors is the SOAR analysis, which provides a structured approach to identifying key areas for improvement and strategizing for future growth. By applying the SOAR framework to the trade sector in Brebes, a clear path for development can be charted, leveraging existing strengths, capitalizing on emerging opportunities, and aligning actions with aspirations for a more vibrant and prosperous trade sector (Zamlista, 2020).

Brebes possesses several strengths that can be leveraged for trade sector development. First, the county boasts a robust agricultural sector, providing a foundation for trade by offering a wide range of products for local and regional markets. This natural abundance creates a demand for trade activities, particularly in wholesale and retail, and establishes a solid base for further development. Second, Brebes' strategic location, with its proximity to major transportation routes and urban centers, facilitates the movement of goods and services, making it a convenient hub for trade activities. This strategic location provides an advantage in terms of accessibility and connectivity, facilitating the flow of goods and services within the county and beyond. Finally, the presence of traditional, informal markets in Brebes demonstrates a strong local demand for goods and services, indicating potential for growth in the formal trade sector. These informal markets provide valuable insights into consumer preferences and market dynamics, offering opportunities for formal businesses to adapt and cater to local needs.

The trade sector in Brebes is also presented with several opportunities for growth. The increasing population and rising per capita income in Brebes create a growing demand for goods and services, presenting a significant opportunity for the trade sector to expand. This demographic shift creates a favorable environment for trade businesses to cater to a larger and more affluent customer base. The rise of e-commerce offers opportunities for trade businesses in Brebes to expand their reach beyond local markets, accessing a wider customer base and potentially boosting sales. E-commerce platforms can connect Brebes businesses with consumers across the country and even internationally, opening up new markets and expanding revenue streams. Finally, the government's focus on supporting Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) can benefit trade businesses, providing access to funding, training, and other resources (Safitri et al., 2020). This support can help businesses overcome financial constraints, develop their skills, and enhance their competitiveness in the market.

The aspirations for the trade sector in Brebes are ambitious yet achievable. The primary aspiration is to develop a more dynamic and competitive trade sector that is more efficient, innovative, and capable of meeting the growing demand for goods and services in Brebes. This vision encompasses a shift towards a more modern and agile trade sector that can effectively respond to evolving market needs. Another key aspiration is to enhance the quality of trade services offered in Brebes, including customer service, product variety, and overall shopping experience. This aspiration

aims to elevate the trade sector's offerings, attracting and retaining customers through superior service and a wider selection of products. Finally, attracting investment in the trade sector is crucial, leading to the development of modern retail outlets, improved infrastructure, and job creation. This goal seeks to attract external investment to modernize the trade sector, improve its infrastructure, and create new opportunities for employment and economic growth (Sofiyati & Agoestanto, 2021).

The potential results of a successful trade sector development strategy are significant and far-reaching. A thriving trade sector would contribute to the overall economic growth of Brebes, generating revenue and creating jobs. A more dynamic trade sector would lead to increased economic activity, boosting revenue streams and creating new employment opportunities (Zulhak, 2020). Investments in infrastructure and logistics would facilitate the movement of goods, making trade more efficient and cost-effective. Improved infrastructure, including transportation networks, warehousing facilities, and logistics systems, would streamline trade processes, reduce costs, and enhance efficiency. Finally, a more competitive trade sector would be better positioned to attract customers, retain talent, and contribute to the overall economic development of Brebes (Sitompul et al., 2022). Enhanced competitiveness would enable businesses to thrive in a dynamic market, attracting customers, retaining skilled workers, and contributing to the overall economic growth of the county.

By carefully considering these strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and potential results, the SOAR analysis provides a roadmap for developing a more dynamic and prosperous trade sector in Brebes Regency. This framework guides strategic decision-making, ensuring that actions align with the county's unique strengths, capitalize on emerging opportunities, and ultimately contribute to achieving a more vibrant and competitive trade sector in Brebes (Table 3).

Table 3. Strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results (SOAR) analysis of trade sector

Category	Factors	Description
Strengths (S)	Strong agricultural base	Brebes has a rich agricultural sector, providing a wide range of products for trade, creating natural demand for wholesale and retail activities.
	Strategic location	Brebes' proximity to major transportation routes and urban centers facilitates the movement of goods and services, making it a convenient hub for trade.
	Existing informal markets	The presence of traditional, informal markets indicates a strong local demand for goods and services, suggesting potential for growth in the formal trade sector.
Opportunities	Growing population and rising per capita income	The increasing population and rising per capita income in Brebes create a growing demand for goods and services, presenting a significant opportunity for the trade sector to expand.
	Development of e-commerce	The rise of e-commerce offers opportunities for trade businesses in Brebes to expand their reach beyond local markets, accessing a wider customer base and potentially boosting sales.
	Government support for MSMEs	The government's focus on supporting Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) can benefit trade businesses, providing access to funding, training, and other resources.
Aspirations (A)	Creating a more dynamic and competitive trade sector	The aspiration is to develop a trade sector that is more efficient, innovative, and capable of meeting the growing demand for goods and services in Brebes.
	Enhancing the quality of trade services	The goal is to improve the quality of trade services offered in Brebes, including customer service, product variety, and overall shopping experience.
	Attracting investment in the trade sector	The aspiration is to attract investment in the trade sector, leading to the development of modern retail outlets, improved infrastructure, and job creation.
Results (R)	Increased the trade activity and revenue	A thriving trade sector would contribute to the overall economic growth of Brebes, generating revenue and creating jobs.

Category	Factors	Description
	Improved infrastructure and logistics	Investments in infrastructure and logistics would facilitate the movement of goods, making trade more efficient and cost-effective.
	Enhanced competitiveness	A more competitive trade sector would be better positioned to attract customers, retain talent, and contribute to the overall economic development of Brebes.

The most immediate and tangible result of a successful trade sector development strategy would be increased trade activity and revenue. A thriving trade sector would contribute significantly to the overall economic growth of Brebes, generating substantial revenue and creating new job opportunities. This increased economic activity would not only benefit individual businesses but also stimulate the local economy as a whole, leading to a ripple effect of positive economic outcomes, including higher tax revenue for the county, increased consumer spending, and improved overall prosperity for the community.

Investments in infrastructure and logistics would be another critical result of a successful trade sector development strategy in Brebes Regency. Improved infrastructure, including transportation networks, warehousing facilities, and logistics systems, would streamline trade processes, reduce costs, and enhance efficiency. By enhancing the logistics and transportation capabilities within Brebes, businesses would be better equipped to handle increased trade volumes, improve supply chain management, and ultimately boost competitiveness in the market.

Enhanced competitiveness would be a key outcome of a successful trade sector development strategy, leading to a more robust and thriving business environment in Brebes Regency. A more competitive trade sector would be better positioned to attract customers, retain skilled workers, and contribute significantly to the overall economic development of the county. By fostering a culture of innovation, efficiency, and customer-centricity, businesses in Brebes would be able to differentiate themselves in the market, seize new opportunities for growth, and establish a strong foothold in the regional and national trade landscape.

4. CONCLUSION

The trade sector in Brebes Regency characterized by a strong reliance on agriculture and local markets, while facing challenges in achieving significant growth. While the trade sector in central Java as a whole is a major contributor to the Province's economy, the trade sector in Brebes has lagged behind, exhibiting slow growth (approximately Rp. 9,000 billion) and relatively low contribution to the county's overall economy. The disparity underscores the need for a strategic approach to trade sector development in Brebes, one that addresses the county's specific strengths, opportunities, and challenges.

An analysis of the trade sector in Brebes reveals a dominance of wholesale and retail trade, reflecting the county's agricultural focus and reliance on local markets. While this structure provides a stable foundation, it also limits the potential for rapid growth in sectors like automotive trade, which require a more diversified economy and greater investment. The slow projected growth of the trade sector in Brebes underscores the need for innovative development strategies to unlock its full potential.

Applying the SOAR framework to the trade sector in Brebes highlights key strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and potential results. The county's strong agricultural base, strategic location, and existing informal markets provide a foundation for growth. Opportunities for expansion lie in the growing population, the development of e-commerce, and government support for MSMEs. Aspirations include creating a more dynamic and competitive trade sector, enhancing the quality of trade services, and attracting investment. The potential results of a successful strategy include increased trade activity and revenue, improved infrastructure and logistics, and enhanced competitiveness.

By leveraging its strengths, capitalizing on opportunities, and pursuing its aspirations, Brebes can create a more dynamic and competitive trade sector that contributes to the county's overall economic prosperity (approximately Rp. 24,000 billion). A strategic approach that incorporates the insights from the SOAR analysis will be crucial for achieving this goal, ensuring that Brebes' trade sector thrives and contributes significantly to the county's economic future. Further research is needed to comprehensively understand the impact of government policies and incentives on the trade sector in Brebes Regency, such an investigation would provide valuable insight for policy makers to refine existing strategies and design more effective policies to support the growth and competitiveness of the Brebes trade sector.

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