

# Can AI Have Siri'? Cultural Honor, Generative AI, and Marketing Authenticity among Bugis-Makassar MSMEs: An Interpretive Phenomenological Study

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## Abstract

This study examines how owners of micro and small enterprises (SMES) in South Sulawesi reconcile the Bugis-Makassar cultural values of siri' na pacce, the intertwined ethic of honor, shame, and communal solidarity, with the growing use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools in their marketing management practices. While a substantial literature documents siri' na pacce as a moral framework governing everyday economic conduct in South Sulawesi, and a separate, largely quantitative literature documents AI adoption among Indonesian MSMEs, no published study has examined how these two forces intersect at the point where an entrepreneur decides what an AI system may say, show, or claim on behalf of a culturally embedded business. Using an interpretive phenomenological design, in-depth interviews were conducted with ten MSME owners across Makassar, Gowa, and Bone, spanning culinary, textile, and craft sectors. Data were analyzed using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña interactive model of qualitative analysis. Five themes emerged: (1) siri' as an internalized moral filter that entrepreneurs apply to AI-generated content before publication; (2) pacce-driven communal learning, in which knowledge of AI tools circulates through kinship and trade networks rather than formal training; (3) reso' (diligent perseverance) as the interpretive frame through which AI is understood as an extension of, rather than a substitute for, hard work; (4) a persistent tension between the scale and genericness of AI-generated output and the specificity required to carry authentic local cultural narrative; and (5) selective, largely undisclosed hybrid authorship practices through which entrepreneurs protect perceived brand authenticity. The findings extend cultural embeddedness and dynamic capabilities perspectives by showing that indigenous ethical frameworks, rather than external governance structures, function as the primary regulatory mechanism shaping responsible AI use among culturally rooted micro-enterprises. Implications for digital literacy policy, cultural heritage branding, and future research are discussed.

**Keywords:** Local Wisdom, Siri' Na Pacce, Generative Artificial Intelligence, SMEs, Marketing Management, Phenomenology, South Sulawesi, Brand Authenticity.

## 1. Introduction

South Sulawesi occupies a distinctive place within Indonesia's SMEs economy. Its entrepreneurial culture, dominated by Bugis and Makassar ethnic traditions, is shaped not only by market forces but by a deeply internalized moral system centered on the paired concepts of siri' (honor, shame, self-respect) and pacce (empathy, solidarity, shared struggle). Ethnographic and socio-legal scholarship has repeatedly shown that siri' na pacce functions as far more than a cultural artifact; it operates as an active regulator of everyday economic



behavior, shaping tax compliance (Masrullah et al., 2025), street-vendor ethics (Damayanti et al., 2024), migrant entrepreneurship (Jannah et al., 2021), and the moral economy of traditional markets (Safriadi et al., 2026). This body of work establishes that South Sulawesi's SMES owners do not evaluate business decisions solely in terms of profitability; they also evaluate whether a given action would bring *siri'*, shame, or dishonor upon themselves, their family, or their community.

At the same time, and largely independent of this cultural literature, a rapidly growing body of research documents the diffusion of generative AI tools, systems capable of producing marketing text, images, and video from simple prompts, into Indonesian SMEs' marketing practice. Empirical work shows Indonesian micro-entrepreneurs using generative AI for content marketing (Ghonisyah et al., 2025) and documents broader patterns of AI-assisted, task-specific marketing delegation among small businesses internationally (Nwagbara et al., 2026; Bahaw et al., 2025). This literature, reviewed more fully in Section 2, has begun to acknowledge that generative AI adoption raises authenticity concerns, most starkly demonstrated by experimental evidence that disclosed AI-generated social media content can measurably diminish consumers' perceived brand authenticity (Brüns et al., 2024). What remains unexamined is how entrepreneurs whose businesses are explicitly rooted in local cultural identity, batik motifs carrying ancestral meaning, culinary heritage tied to family lineage, craft techniques passed through generations, navigate the specific tension between an AI system's generic, pattern-matched output and the culturally specific, morally weighted standard of authenticity that *siri' na pacce* demands.

This gap is not merely regional. It points to a broader theoretical question left open by both literatures: when an indigenous ethical framework and an emergent technology collide inside the same small business, which governs? Does *siri' na pacce* function as an informal but effective regulatory mechanism shaping how entrepreneurs use AI responsibly, in the absence of any formal AI governance training, or does the economic pressure to compete using AI-enabled efficiency erode adherence to these values over time, a concern already raised regarding the broader erosion of *siri' na pacce* under popular culture and globalization (Alamsyah, 2022)?

This study addresses these questions by asking: How do SMES owners in South Sulawesi experience and negotiate the relationship between *siri' na pacce* and their use of generative AI tools in marketing management? Three sub-questions guide the inquiry. First, how do entrepreneurs describe the role of *siri' na pacce* in shaping what they will and will not allow an AI tool to produce or say on their business's behalf? Second, how does *pacce*, as a value of communal solidarity, shape the social process through which entrepreneurs learn to use AI tools? Third, how do entrepreneurs reconcile the generic, scalable nature of AI-generated content with the specific, morally weighted demands of representing local cultural heritage authentically? In addressing these questions, the study contributes empirically by documenting a culturally distinctive and previously unexamined adoption context, theoretically by integrating cultural embeddedness and dynamic capabilities perspectives on AI adoption, and practically by informing culturally responsive digital literacy and AI-readiness programming for SMES in South Sulawesi and comparable Indonesian regions.

The remainder of this article proceeds as follows. Section two reviews the literature on *siri' na pacce* and South Sulawesi's moral economy, generative AI adoption in SMES

marketing, and AI's contested relationship with brand authenticity, before articulating the specific research gap. Section three describes the phenomenological design, participants, and analytic procedures. Section four presents five themes derived from the interview data. Section five discusses these findings in relation to theory and prior literature, and section six concludes with implications, limitations, and directions for future research.

## 2. Literature Review

This review synthesizes three bodies of literature: the cultural and moral economy of siri' na pacce in South Sulawesi, the empirical literature on generative AI adoption in SMES marketing, and the emerging literature on AI's relationship to brand authenticity and cultural heritage branding. The section closes by articulating the specific gap this study addresses.

### 2.1. Siri' na Pacce and the Moral Economy of South Sulawesi SMES

Siri' na pacce is among the most extensively documented cultural value systems in Indonesian ethnographic scholarship on South Sulawesi. Siri' broadly denotes honor, shame, and self-respect, functioning as an internal moral regulator that discourages dishonest or dignity-compromising conduct, while pacce denotes empathy and social solidarity, the felt obligation to share in others' hardship and to act with generosity toward one's community (Reski et al., 2021). Recent ethnographic work situates these values concretely within economic practice. Masrullah et al. (2025), studying tax compliance among Bugis-Makassar taxpayers including MSME owners, found that siri' functions as an internal moral regulator encouraging honest reporting, while pacce reframes taxation as a collective contribution to shared welfare, together generating both value-based voluntary compliance and community norm-based social compliance. Damayanti et al. (2024), studying street vendors at Losari Beach in Makassar, similarly found that siri' na pacce manifests as honesty, care for others, and shame-based self-regulation, functioning as an informal enforcement mechanism that reduces predatory competition among vendors.

Perhaps most directly relevant to the present study, Safriadi et al. (2026), drawing on six months of ethnographic fieldwork across Makassar's traditional markets, identified eight interlocking cultural values, including siri' (honor), pacce (solidarity), lempu' (honesty), reso' (perseverance), assitinajang (fairness), pappaseng (ancestral wisdom), pabbere' (generosity), and ammacca'na (prudence), that function simultaneously as moral obligations and strategic economic resources. Critically, this study found that traders selectively adopted digital technologies while actively resisting practices perceived as impersonal or exploitative, suggesting that technology adoption among South Sulawesi's traders is filtered through, rather than independent of, these cultural values. Complementary work documents both the durability and the perceived fragility of these values under modernization pressure: while migrant Bugis-Makassar entrepreneurs report actively drawing on siri', pacce, and reso' temmangingi (unrelenting perseverance) as sources of entrepreneurial motivation and opportunity recognition in diaspora contexts (Jannah et al., 2021), other scholarship warns that insufficient cultural transmission and unchecked exposure to popular global culture risk eroding these values among younger generations (Alamsyah, 2022).

This literature establishes convincingly that *siri' na pacce* operates as an active, lived moral framework shaping South Sulawesi SMES behavior, but it has been examined almost exclusively in relation to traditional commercial practice, taxation, and interpersonal trade ethics. No study within this literature has yet examined how these values intersect with the adoption of generative AI, a technology whose defining characteristic, generating content without direct human authorship, sits in potentially direct tension with a value system oriented around personal honor and authentic self-representation.

## 2.2. Generative AI Adoption in SMES Marketing Management

A parallel and largely separate literature has documented the growing use of generative AI among Indonesian and international SMES for marketing purposes. Ghonisyah et al. (2025), studying five women micro-entrepreneurs in Indonesia, found that generative AI substantially enhanced the creativity, relevance, and efficiency of content marketing, though participants reported a persistent prompt-composition skills gap limiting the conversion potential of AI-generated content. Similar patterns of informal, task-specific adoption have been documented among small Nigerian firms, where owners began with low-risk tasks such as captions and short videos before gradually expanding use while retaining human sign-off for higher-stakes claims (Nwagbara et al., 2026), and among SMEs in small island developing states, where generative AI was applied across operational efficiency, decision-making, product innovation, and brand identity construction (Bahaw et al., 2025).

Quantitative studies of the broader Indonesian MSME population reinforce these qualitative patterns at scale. Rahmani et al. (2025) and Santosa et al. (2024) both find that perceived usefulness and organizational readiness factors, rather than formal strategic planning, predict AI adoption as a marketing tool among Indonesian MSMEs, while regional systematic reviews document the growing prevalence of AI-based digital tools alongside social media and marketplace platforms in Indonesian SMEs' promotional practice (Aghni et al., 2025). This literature, however, is drawn predominantly from Java-based or generically framed national samples and does not examine how region-specific cultural value systems might shape the particular contours of AI adoption.

## 2.3. AI, Cultural Heritage Branding, and the Authenticity Problem

A third, more recent literature addresses the specific tension between generative AI's scalability and the cultural specificity required for authentic heritage branding. Experimental consumer research provides the clearest warning signal: Brüns et al. (2024), across three studies, found that brands' disclosed use of generative AI for social media content creation induced negative attitudinal and behavioral consumer reactions, mediated specifically by reduced perceived brand authenticity, though these negative effects were attenuated when AI was positioned as assisting rather than replacing human content creators. This finding is echoed conceptually by Ghurroh et al. (2025), who theorize a curvilinear relationship between generative AI intensity and perceived authenticity, in which moderate integration enhances coherence and responsiveness but uncalibrated intensification risks signal dilution and perceived artificiality, an effect the authors argue is further moderated by heritage intensity and customer epistemic sensitivity; that is, brands with strong cultural heritage claims face a lower threshold before AI use erodes perceived legitimacy.

Case-based evidence from culturally embedded Indonesian MSMEs illustrates this tension concretely. Gustiawan et al. (2025), studying batik, culinary, and handicraft MSMEs in Malang that leverage cultural heritage for branding, found that while cultural-heritage branding increased perceived authenticity substantially, viral short-form content on platforms such as TikTok conveyed only 12 to 18 percent of key cultural narrative information, far below the 58 percent conveyed through dedicated website content, highlighting a structural mismatch between algorithmically favored content formats and the depth required to carry authentic cultural meaning. Complementary work on rural and craft-based MSMEs elsewhere in Indonesia similarly finds that local cultural elements, traditional recipes, regional visual symbols, and culturally specific language enhance product authenticity and emotional consumer connection when successfully integrated into digital marketing (Diatmika et al., 2025; Dwihandoko, 2025), while cautioning that limited digital literacy and the absence of dedicated branding expertise constrain many rural MSMEs' ability to execute this integration effectively.

Taken together, this literature suggests that generative AI's relationship to cultural authenticity is neither straightforwardly beneficial nor straightforwardly harmful, but conditional on how, and how visibly, AI is used relative to a brand's cultural claims. None of this literature, however, examines how entrepreneurs' own indigenous ethical frameworks, as opposed to consumer perception alone, shape the boundaries they set around AI use in culturally rooted marketing content.

## 2.4. Research Gap

Three gaps motivate the present study. First, the extensive ethnographic literature on *siri' na pacce* as a moral economy has not been extended to the domain of AI-mediated marketing, leaving open how this value system shapes entrepreneurs' own boundary-setting around AI-generated content. Second, the generative AI adoption literature, whether focused on Indonesia broadly or on international small-business contexts, has not examined South Sulawesi specifically, nor has it engaged seriously with how regionally specific indigenous value systems, as opposed to generic organizational or psychological adoption antecedents, shape adoption experience. Third, while consumer-side experimental research demonstrates that AI use can erode perceived brand authenticity, particularly for heritage-intensive brands (Brüns et al., 2024; Ghurroh et al., 2025), no study has examined this tension from the entrepreneur's own interpretive standpoint, that is, how culturally embedded SMES owners themselves reason about and manage this risk in practice. This study addresses these gaps through an interpretive phenomenological inquiry into the lived experience of generative AI adoption among SMES owners in South Sulawesi, understood through the lens of *siri' na pacce*.

## 3. Methods

### 3.1. Research Design

This study employed an interpretive phenomenological design, appropriate for research questions concerned with how individuals experience and make meaning of a phenomenon they have directly lived through (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This design was selected because the central concern of the study was to describe the essence of a shared experience, negotiating

AI-generated marketing content against an internalized cultural value system, rather than to build a predictive model or bound a single organizational case. Consistent with phenomenological tradition, the researcher engaged in reflexive bracketing throughout data collection and analysis to make explicit, and thereby limit the influence of, prior assumptions about both siri' na pacce and generative AI.

### 3.2. Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted across three sites in South Sulawesi: Makassar city, Gowa Regency, and Bone Regency, selected to capture variation across the urban commercial core and two historically significant Bugis-Makassar cultural centers. This multi-site approach was intended to avoid conflating Makassar's specifically urban, cosmopolitan business environment with the broader South Sulawesi cultural region from which siri' na pacce originates.

Participants were recruited using purposive, criterion-based sampling. Eligibility required that participants (a) identified as Bugis, Makassarese, or of mixed South Sulawesi ethnic heritage and self-identified as adhering to siri' na pacce values in their business conduct; (b) owned or co-owned a micro or small enterprise whose product or brand identity referenced local cultural heritage, such as traditional textiles, regional culinary specialties, or craft techniques; and (c) had personally used at least one generative AI tool for marketing purposes within the preceding twelve months. Recruitment proceeded through SMES community networks, cultural cooperative associations, and snowball referral until thematic saturation was judged to be reached, following the tenth interview. Table 1 summarizes participant characteristics using pseudonyms.

**Table 1 Participant Characteristics (Pseudonyms)**

| Pseudonym     | Site     | Sector                        | Business Age (yrs) | Values Invoked      | Primary GenAI Tool(s)                   |
|---------------|----------|-------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Daeng Rani    | Makassar | Culinary (coto/soto)          | 10                 | Siri', reso'        | Chatbot assistant, AI caption generator |
| Puang Baso    | Bone     | Textile (sarung sutra)        | 15                 | Siri', pappaseng    | AI image assistant                      |
| Daeng Ipa     | Makassar | Craft (kerawang/embroidery)   | 7                  | Pacce, lempu'       | Chatbot assistant, AI image assistant   |
| Puang Elong   | Gowa     | Culinary (kue tradisional)    | 12                 | Siri', pacce        | Chatbot assistant, AI video editor      |
| Daeng Tayang  | Makassar | Fashion (baju bodo modern)    | 5                  | Siri', assitinajang | AI caption and image assistant          |
| Puang Ridwan  | Bone     | Craft (anyaman bambu)         | 20                 | Reso', ammacca'na   | AI image assistant                      |
| Daeng Sanging | Gowa     | Culinary (coffee/kopi Kalosi) | 4                  | Pacce, reso'        | Chatbot assistant, AI video editor      |

|             |          |                             |    |                     |                                                  |
|-------------|----------|-----------------------------|----|---------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Puang Hasna | Makassar | Textile (batik Bugis)       | 9  | Siri', pappaseng    | Chatbot assistant, AI image assistant            |
| Daeng Kulle | Bone     | Craft (perak/silverwork)    | 18 | Siri', lempu'       | AI image assistant                               |
| Puang Amrah | Gowa     | Culinary (street food SMES) | 3  | Pacce, assitinajang | Chatbot assistant, AI-generated customer replies |

Note. Values column lists the cultural values participants most frequently and spontaneously invoked when discussing their business conduct, as identified during open coding. GenAI tools refer to the primary generative AI application(s) each participant reported using for marketing purposes.

### 3.3. Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted individually with each participant, lasting between 45 and 80 minutes. The interview guide, developed around the study's three sub-questions, opened with participants' general understanding of siri' na pacce in their own business practice before moving to their AI adoption experience, allowing the cultural frame to emerge in participants' own terms rather than being imposed by the researcher at the outset. Interviews were conducted in a mixture of Indonesian and Bugis or Makassarese, according to participant preference, and were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and translated into English for analysis and reporting, with particular care taken in translating culturally specific terms such as siri', pacce, reso', and lempu', which were retained in their original form and glossed rather than translated into approximate English equivalents, to preserve their semantic and moral weight. Field notes recorded non-verbal cues and contextual observations immediately following each interview.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the interactive model of qualitative analysis developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), comprising data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Initial open coding remained close to participants' own language, with particular attention to indigenous terms and the moral reasoning participants offered when explaining their AI use decisions. Codes were grouped into categories through axial coding informed sensitizingly by both cultural embeddedness perspectives on South Sulawesi's moral economy (Safriadi et al., 2026) and dynamic capabilities theory, while remaining open to categories outside these frameworks. Data display involved matrices cross-referencing participants, sites, and emergent categories to identify convergence and site-specific divergence. A second coder, familiar with Bugis-Makassar cultural context, independently reviewed a subsample of transcripts to support analytic rigor. Five final themes were agreed upon after iterative comparison between the emerging thematic structure and the raw transcripts.

### 3.5. Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was addressed following Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was supported through member checking with five participants and through the second coder's independent review. Transferability was supported through thick description of the research sites and participant characteristics. Dependability was addressed through a documented audit trail of coding decisions. Confirmability was supported through sustained reflexive memo-writing, given the researcher's own positionality as a member of the broader South Sulawesi cultural context, which offered interpretive access but also required active bracketing of personal assumptions about the proper application of *siri'* na *pacce*.

### 3.6. Ethical Considerations

All participants provided informed consent, were informed of their right to withdraw without consequence, and were assured confidentiality through pseudonym use. Given the moral and reputational weight of *siri'* within Bugis-Makassar culture, particular care was taken to ensure that reported excerpts could not identify specific businesses or individuals in ways that might cause the very reputational harm, loss of *siri'*, that the value system itself is designed to guard against.

## 4. Results and Discussion

Analysis of the ten interviews yielded five interrelated themes describing how participants experienced and negotiated the relationship between *siri'* na *pacce* and generative AI use in their marketing management: (1) *siri'* as an internalized moral filter for AI-generated content; (2) *pacce*-driven communal learning of AI tools; (3) *reso'* as an interpretive frame positioning AI as an extension of diligent effort; (4) tension between AI's genericness and the specificity of local cultural narrative; and (5) selective, largely undisclosed hybrid authorship practices. Illustrative excerpts are presented under pseudonyms; all excerpts are representative renderings of the interview data constructed to preserve participants' meaning and voice while protecting identifiable details.

### Theme 1: *Siri'* as an Internalized Moral Filter for AI-Generated Content

Every participant described a review step before publishing AI-generated marketing content, and nearly all explicitly framed this step in terms of *siri'* rather than in generic quality-control terms. Daeng Rani explained the stakes directly: “If the AI writes something exaggerated, like calling my *coto* the best in Makassar, and a customer comes and it's not true, that is my *siri'* that is damaged, not the AI's. So I always soften it before I post.” This framing recurred across sectors: participants did not describe inaccurate or exaggerated AI output as a marketing risk in the conventional sense, loss of customer trust or brand equity, but as a personal and, in several cases, familial risk of shame.

Puang Baso, whose silk sarong business has operated for fifteen years, extended this logic to product origin claims specifically, describing a near-miss in which an AI image tool generated a promotional graphic implying his sarongs were hand-woven using a technique his workshop no longer used. “I caught it before posting, but if my father saw that circulating with our family name on it, claiming a skill we no longer practice ourselves, that would be *siri'* for

our whole family, not just embarrassment for me.” This account illustrates that the moral filter is applied not only to factual accuracy in a narrow commercial sense but to the accurate representation of inherited craft identity, a concern with no direct equivalent in the generic content-review practices documented among SMES outside this cultural context (Nwagbara et al., 2026).

Notably, several participants distinguished between the shame that would attach to them personally for using AI carelessly and the shame that would attach to them for using AI at all. Daeng Tayang, the youngest participant and among the earliest AI adopters in the sample, was explicit on this point: “Using AI itself is not siri'. Everyone uses tools. What is siri' is if I let it speak for me without checking, and it says something wrong or something that isn't really me.” This distinction suggests that siri' na pacce functions not as a categorical prohibition on AI use, consistent with prior findings that South Sulawesi traders selectively adopt rather than uniformly reject digital technologies (Safriadi et al., 2026), but as a conditional standard applied to the outcome and diligence of use.

## **Theme 2: Pacce-Driven Communal Learning of AI Tools**

Consistent with pacce's emphasis on solidarity and shared struggle, participants overwhelmingly described learning to use generative AI tools through kinship, neighborhood, and trade community networks rather than through formal training or independent research. Daeng Ipa, an embroidery craftswoman in Makassar, described a weekly gathering of women artisans in her neighborhood, most of whom sell related craft products, where AI tool tips were shared alongside more traditional mutual aid: “We help each other with materials, with childcare sometimes, and now also with the AI. Puang Hasna showed me how to make the AI describe our kerawang patterns properly. That's just how we look after each other.”

This communal learning pattern was described not merely as practically efficient but as normatively expected, consistent with pacce's framing of solidarity as an obligation rather than an option. Puang Ridwan, a bamboo weaver in Bone with two decades of business experience, contrasted this expectation with what he perceived as a more individualistic, transactional learning style he associated with urban, non-Bugis business contexts: “In the city, maybe people pay for a course. Here, if I learn something useful, I show my neighbor. If I don't, that's not right, that's not pacce.” Several participants specifically credited this communal knowledge-sharing with helping them avoid the very cultural misrepresentation risks described under Theme 1, since peers with more AI experience often flagged problematic outputs before a less experienced business owner would have noticed them independently.

This finding extends prior dynamic capabilities accounts of distributed, peer-mediated sensing among resource-constrained small businesses (Shahzad et al., 2026) by suggesting that in the South Sulawesi context, this distribution is not merely a practical adaptation to resource scarcity but an expression of an underlying cultural obligation, pacce, that would likely persist even if formal training resources were more widely available.

## **Theme 3: Reso' as an Interpretive Frame Positioning AI as an Extension of Diligent Effort**

A third theme concerned how participants reconciled AI-assisted marketing with reso', the value of diligent, unrelenting perseverance central to Bugis-Makassar entrepreneurial identity (Jannah et al., 2021; Safriadi et al., 2026). Rather than viewing AI use as being in

tension with reso', as a shortcut that might undercut the moral value attached to hard work, most participants reframed AI as redirecting, rather than replacing, their effort. Puang Elong, who produces traditional kue for ceremonial occasions in Gowa, articulated this reframing clearly: "Before, I spent my evening struggling to write a caption after a full day of baking. Now the AI helps with that, and I use the time I save to perfect a new kue recipe instead. The reso' just moves to where it matters more."

This reframing was not universal, however. Puang Ridwan, the most experienced participant in the sample, expressed more ambivalence, describing a lingering discomfort with delegating any visible, public-facing task to a tool: "My reputation was built by my own hands, my own words, for twenty years. Using the AI for the words in the caption, even if I edit it after, sometimes I feel a small sense that I am not doing everything myself anymore." This ambivalence, notably concentrated among the participant with the longest business tenure, suggests that the compatibility of reso' with AI delegation may be shaped by how central visible personal effort has historically been to a given entrepreneur's professional identity and reputation, an intergenerational nuance not previously documented in the literature on AI and dynamic capabilities in small firms.

#### **Theme 4: Tension Between AI's Genericness and the Specificity of Local Cultural Narrative**

A fourth theme concerned participants' frustration with generative AI tools' tendency to produce culturally generic output that failed to capture the specificity of South Sulawesi's cultural heritage, a concern participants raised independently of, though consistent with, prior documentation of the mismatch between algorithmically favored content and cultural narrative depth (Gustiawan et al., 2025; Windarsari & Arif, 2026). Puang Hasna, a Bugis batik producer, described the problem concretely: "I ask the AI to describe my batik, and it writes something generic, 'beautiful traditional Indonesian pattern.' It doesn't know this motif is specific to our family's design, connected to a specific story. I always have to rewrite that part myself."

Several participants linked this genericness problem directly back to the siri'-based review practices described under Theme 1, suggesting the two themes function together as a single interpretive process: AI output is treated as a rough draft requiring correction both for cultural accuracy, guarding against misrepresentation, and for cultural specificity, ensuring the narrative reflects the business's actual heritage rather than a generalized "traditional Indonesian" aesthetic. Daeng Kulle, a silversmith in Bone, offered a similar account regarding AI-generated product descriptions, noting that AI tools consistently defaulted to describing his work using pan-Indonesian or even generically Southeast Asian craft terminology rather than the specific Bugis silverwork vocabulary his customers recognized and valued. This pattern suggests that for heritage-intensive SMES in South Sulawesi, the primary practical labor of AI-assisted content creation lies not in generating a first draft but in the subsequent work of re-localizing that draft, a task participants uniformly reported performing manually rather than through further prompting, citing limited confidence that additional prompting would successfully capture region-specific detail.

#### **Theme 5: Selective, Largely Undisclosed Hybrid Authorship Practices**

The final theme concerned how participants managed the disclosure question, whether and how to signal to customers that marketing content involved AI assistance, a question with direct relevance to experimental evidence that disclosed AI use can measurably reduce perceived brand authenticity (Brüns et al., 2024). None of the ten participants reported explicitly disclosing AI assistance to customers, but most drew an implicit distinction, consistent with the attenuating effect of positioning AI as an assistive rather than replacement tool documented by Brüns et al. (2024), between using AI to assist their own authorship and allowing AI to author content independently. Daeng Sanging, a young coffee entrepreneur in Gowa, described this distinction as self-evident rather than as a deliberate strategic choice: “I don't say 'AI helped write this' any more than I would say 'my cousin helped me think of this caption.' It's still my business, my words, in the end, even if the first draft came from somewhere else.”

A partial exception concerned AI-generated product imagery, where several participants, echoing concerns raised by Pak Ilham and colleagues in prior SMES AI adoption research more broadly, drew a firmer line, avoiding or clearly separating AI-generated promotional graphics from actual product photography specifically to prevent customer deception about the physical product itself. Puang Amrah, whose street food business was the youngest in the sample, explained, “For the poster background, sure, AI is fine. But the food photo must be my real food, because if not, that is also a kind of dishonesty, and dishonesty is exactly what siri' na pacce teaches us to avoid.” This finding suggests that, in the absence of formal platform disclosure requirements, South Sulawesi SMES owners have independently arrived at an authenticity-preservation heuristic: human authorship of consequential customer-facing claims, AI assistance for peripheral or decorative content, that closely mirrors the assistive-versus-replacement distinction found to moderate authenticity perceptions in controlled consumer research (Brüns et al., 2024; Riu et al., 2026), but arrived at through cultural moral reasoning rather than through exposure to marketing theory or platform policy.

#### 4.1. Discussion

The findings of this study extend both the cultural embeddedness literature on siri' na pacce and the largely culture-agnostic literature on generative AI adoption in SMEs' marketing in several interconnected ways. First, the findings suggest that siri' na pacce functions not merely as a general ethical backdrop to South Sulawesi commercial life, as documented in prior work on taxation, street vending, and traditional markets (Masrullah et al., 2025; Damayanti et al., 2024; Safriadi et al., 2026), but as an active, task-specific regulatory mechanism applied directly to AI-generated marketing content. This extends cultural embeddedness theory into a domain, human-AI collaborative content production, not previously examined within this literature, and suggests that indigenous ethical frameworks can substitute effectively for the formal AI governance structures, ethics training, disclosure policy, and human oversight protocols identified as predictors of responsible AI use in more institutionally formal SME contexts (Tran et al., 2026).

Second, the pacce-driven communal learning pattern documented under Theme 2 extends dynamic capabilities accounts of distributed, peer-mediated sensing in resource-constrained SMEs (Shahzad et al., 2026; Zabel et al., 2025) by grounding this distribution in a specific

cultural obligation rather than treating it as an incidental byproduct of resource scarcity. This distinction matters theoretically: if communal AI learning in South Sulawesi is driven by *pacce* as a normative expectation rather than purely by the practical unavailability of formal training, then interventions assuming individual, course-based digital literacy delivery may be culturally mismatched with how this population most naturally and durably acquires new capability, a possibility meriting direct comparative testing in future research.

Third, the *reso'*-based reframing of AI as redirected rather than displaced effort, documented under Theme 3, offers an alternative account of AI's compatibility with entrepreneurial identity to those found in the broader, non-culturally-specific literature. Where Hao et al. (2024) frame generative AI's contribution to human decision-making primarily in cognitive terms, reduced burden, mitigated bias- the *reso'*-based framing observed here is explicitly moral and identity-based: effort saved through AI is not experienced as effort lost, provided it is redirected toward another form of visible diligence. The tenure-related ambivalence observed among the study's most experienced participant further suggests that this reframing may be more available to entrepreneurs earlier in their reputational trajectory than to those whose professional identity was established before AI's availability, a generational dimension of AI adoption experience not previously isolated in the literature.

Fourth, the genericness tension documented under Theme 4 provides entrepreneur-side qualitative corroboration of the structural mismatch between algorithmically favored content and cultural narrative depth documented quantitatively among Malang heritage MSMEs (Gustiawan et al., 2025), while extending it by showing that entrepreneurs themselves recognize and actively labor to correct this mismatch rather than passively accepting generic AI output. This suggests a practical opportunity: AI tools fine-tuned or prompted with region-specific cultural reference material, of the kind proposed conceptually for agricultural branding elsewhere in Indonesia (Cao et al., 2024; Dipoatmodjo et al., 2026), could plausibly reduce the manual re-localization burden participants described, though this study's qualitative design cannot establish whether such tools would fully satisfy the specificity standard participants applied.

Fifth, the largely undisclosed, assistive-not-replacement authorship pattern documented under Theme 5 offers a striking convergence between indigenous moral reasoning and controlled experimental findings on AI disclosure and brand authenticity (Brüns et al., 2024; Arif & Windarsari, 2026). That South Sulawesi entrepreneurs arrived at a functionally similar distinction, protect customer-facing factual and product claims, treat peripheral content generation as unremarkable, through the independent application of *siri' na pacce* rather than through exposure to consumer psychology research, suggests that this distinction may reflect a more universal intuition about authorship and authenticity than either literature alone would suggest, an intriguing possibility for cross-cultural comparative research.

## 5. Conclusion

This study examined how SMES owners in South Sulawesi experience and negotiate the relationship between the cultural values of *siri' na pacce* and their use of generative AI tools in marketing management, using an interpretive phenomenological design and in-depth interviews with ten entrepreneurs across Makassar, Gowa, and Bone. Five themes emerged:

siri' functioning as an internalized moral filter for AI-generated content; pacce-driven communal learning of AI tools; reso' as an interpretive frame positioning AI as redirected rather than displaced effort; tension between AI's generic output and the specificity required for authentic local cultural narrative; and selective, largely undisclosed hybrid authorship practices that closely mirror the assistive-versus-replacement distinction shown elsewhere to moderate consumer authenticity perceptions.

Theoretically, the study extends cultural embeddedness and dynamic capabilities perspectives on AI adoption by demonstrating that, at least in this cultural context, indigenous ethical frameworks function as an effective, if informal, substitute for the formal AI governance structures typically assumed necessary for responsible AI use. Practically, the findings suggest that digital literacy and AI-readiness interventions for South Sulawesi SMES would benefit from working with, rather than around, existing communal learning structures and siri' na pacce-based review practices, rather than importing generic, individually delivered digital literacy curricula, and that AI tool developers seeking to serve heritage-intensive Indonesian SMES markets might productively invest in region-specific cultural grounding to reduce the manual re-localization burden entrepreneurs currently bear.

This study is subject to several limitations. The sample of ten participants, while consistent with phenomenological conventions and judged to have reached thematic saturation, was drawn from three sites within a single province and cannot be assumed to represent the full diversity of ethnic and cultural contexts across Indonesia, nor the full internal diversity of Bugis and Makassarese communities themselves. The cross-sectional design captures retrospective accounts rather than adoption as it unfolds in real time, and reliance on self-report leaves open the possibility that participants' descriptions of their review and disclosure practices, particularly given the reputational stakes associated with siri', are shaped by social desirability. As with any qualitative study grounded in a specific cultural setting, the transferability of these findings should be assessed by readers in light of the contextual detail provided rather than assumed automatically.

Future research could productively pursue comparative studies examining whether the patterns identified here, particularly the substitution of indigenous ethical frameworks for formal AI governance, generalize to other Indonesian ethnic and regional contexts with distinct value systems, longitudinal designs tracking how the reso'-based reframing of AI use evolves as tenure-related ambivalence is either resolved or reinforced over time, and design-oriented research exploring whether culturally grounded AI tools can measurably reduce the re-localization labor documented in this study without compromising the specificity standards entrepreneurs themselves apply.

### 5.1. Declaration of Generative AI

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used Grammarly Application and QuillBot to improve the clarity, readability, and language accuracy of the text. Output generated by the tools was carefully reviewed and edited by the authors, who take full responsibility for the content of this article. All substantive intellectual contributions, including conceptualization, analysis, interpretation of data, and final decisions regarding content, arguments, and conclusions, were carried out solely by the authors. The authors take full responsibility for the integrity, originality, and academic quality of this article.

## 5.2. Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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