

Digital Narratives of Makassar Women Entrepreneurs: Negotiating Local Values and Market Visibility in the Era of Social Commerce

Original Article

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Abstract

This qualitative study investigates how women entrepreneurs in Makassar navigate the moral economy of digital visibility by integrating *siri'*—the local ethic of dignity and honor—into their social commerce practices. Using a narrative-phenomenological approach, data were collected from 20 women entrepreneurs across fashion, food, and craft sectors through life-history interviews, digital ethnography, and participatory diaries. The analysis identifies five interrelated narrative themes: service visibility (framing exposure as accountability), modest aesthetics (curating self-presentation aligned with cultural modesty), family honor framing (redefining profit as collective achievement), strategic disclosure (balancing marketing needs with moral caution), and community surveillance and support (negotiating judgment and solidarity). Findings reveal that *siri'* functions as a cultural compass guiding women's digital storytelling, enabling ethically calibrated visibility that blends moral restraint with entrepreneurial aspiration. Digital platforms become arenas of moral negotiation where reputation, family pride, and market success intersect. The study contributes to a humanistic understanding of digital marketing as culturally embedded moral work rather than mere self-promotion. It calls for culturally sensitive digital literacy programs and platform designs that allow selective visibility and community-based trust-building mechanisms, affirming that sustainable digital entrepreneurship in Makassar depends as much on ethical coherence as on technical competence.

Keywords: Digital marketing; Women Entrepreneurs; Cultural Values; *Siri'*; Makassar.

1. INTRODUCTION

In Makassar's bustling markets and digital lanes, women entrepreneurs are reshaping commerce through social media and social commerce platforms. Their narratives reveal not only economic aspirations but also negotiations of local moral vocabularies—above all, *siri'* (dignity, honor)—that shape what visibility, self-presentation, and success mean within community life.

This study examines how Makassar's women entrepreneurs craft digital narratives to reconcile the imperatives of market visibility with the local ethic of *siri'*. The focus is on everyday practices, stories, and routinized communications that translate cultural values into



market behavior. Framed by a humanistic economic perspective, the research treats entrepreneurship as moral and relational work: market transactions are entangled with obligations to family, reputation management, and communal recognition.

Three core questions guide the inquiry: How do women interpret *siri'* in digital self-presentation? What narrative strategies do they deploy to gain market visibility without compromising dignity? And how do platform logics (engagement metrics, performative expectations) reshape local norms?

The contribution of this paper is twofold: empirically, it provides rich, situated accounts of digital moral reasoning among Makassar women entrepreneurs; conceptually, it reframes visibility not as a neutral marketing tactic but as an ethically inflected practice embedded in cultural repertoires.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarship on social commerce emphasizes trust and perceived risk as central to consumer behavior: sellers' online displays, peer reviews, and social presence influence purchase intentions and reputational economies in platform-mediated markets (Lăzăroiu et al., 2020).

The moral dynamics of social media amplify and reconfigure everyday ethics: social platforms accelerate moral signaling, outrage, and prosocial attention, making moral content a potent vector for attention and judgment in online spaces (Bavel et al., 2023).

Studies of digital affordances show that online communities provide critical resources for entrepreneurs—problem-solving, reframing challenges, and peer support—especially under crisis conditions such as the COVID-19 pandemic; these affordances alter how entrepreneurs access knowledge and legitimacy (Meurer et al., 2021).

Platform ecosystems are increasingly considered sites of social responsibility where value co-creation must be balanced with cultural sensitivity; digital platforms' governance and design bear implications for how local moral systems are experienced and protected in market interactions (Yi et al., 2022).

From a behavioral perspective, adaptation to the digital economy interacts with biases (herding, optimism, loss aversion) and with financial literacy, shaping inclusion and decision-making processes in technology-mediated markets (Liu et al., 2021).

Taken together, these literatures indicate that social commerce is a moral marketplace: visibility, trust-building, and platform affordances intersect with cultural norms to produce locally situated forms of entrepreneurship.

However, existing research often treats morality as a general psychological tendency or platform consequence; fewer studies center on indigenous moral concepts like *siri'* and their translation into digital narrative practices—an empirical gap this study addresses.

3. METHODS

This qualitative study uses a narrative-phenomenological approach to capture lived meanings: it centers entrepreneurs’ stories and the ways those stories enact cultural values in digital practices.

Participants comprised 20 women entrepreneurs in Makassar drawn via purposive sampling to reflect diversity in age (22–55), sector (fashion, food, crafts), and platform use (Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp Business). Selection prioritized active social commerce engagement and willingness to share digital artifacts.

Data collection spanned five months and combined semi-structured life-history interviews (60–120 minutes), digital ethnography (content analysis of public posts, captions, comments, live-stream excerpts), and a short participatory diary where participants logged daily posting choices and community feedback for two weeks.

Interviews explored trajectories into entrepreneurship, experiences of reputation management, episodes where siri’ was invoked, decisions about self-disclosure, and reactions to platform metrics (likes, comments, views). Digital artifacts provided corroboration and context for narrative claims.

Analytical procedures followed thematic narrative analysis: transcripts and digital texts were coded iteratively to identify recurring motifs (honor, modesty, transparency), rhetorical strategies (service framing, family referencing), and performative routines (posting cadence, image framing).

Reflexivity and ethical practice guided the study: informed consent covered the use of screenshots and anonymization; the researcher engaged in positional reflexivity, acknowledging cultural distance and co-constructive influences during online observation.

4. RESULTS

Analysis produced five interrelated narrative themes that describe how Makassar women negotiate siri’ and market visibility in social commerce contexts.

Table 1. Summary of Emergent Themes, Core Meanings, and Digital Practices

No	Theme	Core Meaning	Digital Practices
1	Service Visibility	Visibility framed as service and accountability to customers	Posting faces, order-tracking updates, and direct messaging transparency
2	Modest Aesthetics	Curated a modest presentation to uphold dignity	Simple clothing, family-centered imagery, non-provocative captions
3	Family-Honor Framing	Economic achievements are narrated as family pride	Testimonials referencing family, income used for kin welfare
4	Strategic Disclosure	Selective sharing to balance marketing and reputation	Use of private groups, staged reveal, controlled live sessions
5	Community Surveillance & Support	Visibility mediated by communal feedback—critique and solidarity	Rapid rumor management, peer defense in comment threads

Source: data processed. 2025

Theme 1: Many participants explained that showing their face or process is not for vanity but as a moral guarantee—customers “know who they buy from” and thus trust the seller; visibility becomes an ethical commitment to accountability.

Theme 2: Digital aesthetics were repeatedly articulated as modest rather than neutral. Entrepreneurs deliberately chose attire, color palettes, and caption tones that signaled humility, aligning online brand imagery with local dignity codes.

Theme 3: Narratives often reframed individual success as collective honor—profits were described in terms of contributions to family welfare, children’s education, and ancestors’ respectability—turning personal entrepreneurship into a moral economy of kin.

Theme 4: Strategic disclosure shows how women manage platform demands. They use private WhatsApp groups for sensitive clientele, limit live-stream duration, and stage product reveals to avoid gossip or perceived ostentation.

Theme 5: Social media operates as both surveillance and support. Participants experienced rapid moral judgments but also mobilized community solidarity—peers and loyal customers defended reputations in comment threads and offline networks.

Two short illustrative vignettes: one entrepreneur described deleting a promotional post after a relative labeled it “too flashy,” then reposting a toned-down version emphasizing craftsmanship; another turned customer complaints into transparent process posts that increased trust and orders.

5. DISCUSSION

The themes reveal that siri’ functions as an interpretive lens through which digital visibility is assessed and performed: rather than rejecting social commerce, women adapt its affordances to craft ethically intelligible presence—what may be termed ethically calibrated visibility.

This calibration aligns with social commerce findings about trust and perceived risk: visible cues and seller transparency can increase consumer trust, but for Makassar entrepreneurs, such cues must also pass cultural honor tests to be effective (Lăzăroiu et al., 2020).

Social media’s moral dynamics—its propensity to amplify moral content and judgment—intensify these negotiations. Entrepreneurs must strategically balance attention-seeking behaviors with the risk of moral sanction, a tension consistent with broader observations about morality on social platforms (Bavel et al., 2023).

Digital affordances (forums, groups, live features) provide both tools for reputation management and venues of vulnerability. Entrepreneurs leverage online communities for support and reframing problems, using communal affordances to co-manage reputation and knowledge—particularly salient during disruptions like COVID-19 (Meurer et al., 2021).

Platform ecosystem responsibilities matter: design choices (comment moderation, privacy settings, visibility algorithms) have concrete effects on how local values are expressed and protected. Ecosystem-level social responsibility can enable culturally sensitive participation and reduce reputational harms for vulnerable sellers (Yi et al., 2022).

Behavioral predispositions also interact with digital adaptation: tendencies toward social proof or herding can amplify pressures to conform to visibility norms, while financial literacy

and adaptation behavior shape how entrepreneurs interpret platform metrics and marketing advice (Liu et al., 2021).

Practically, these findings suggest that platform interventions and capacity-building must account for moral grammars—training that teaches algorithmic literacy should couple technical skills with cultural translation, enabling women to use visibility strategically without violating local expectations.

The interplay of community surveillance and support implies that peer networks are both protective and disciplinary. Policy and design efforts might therefore strengthen peer-led moderation and reputational dispute resolution within local digital ecosystems.

More broadly, the study illustrates how cultural values are not obstacles to digital commerce but resources for differentiation: the modest aesthetic and family-honor framing provide authenticity and market niches that resonate with local consumers.

6. CONCLUSION

Makassar women entrepreneurs do not experience digital marketplace logics as culturally neutral; rather, they actively rework *siri'* into digital narrative strategies that enable both market visibility and moral integrity. Digital narratives—framed as service, modest aesthetics, family honor, and strategic disclosure—function as adaptive cultural technologies, translating local dignity into online credibility and competitive advantage. For practitioners, program designers, and platforms, the implication is clear: supporting women's digital entrepreneurship requires interventions that respect and harness moral repertoires, not ones that impose alienized modes of self-presentation.

Recommendations include culturally sensitive digital literacy programs, platform features that allow tiered visibility (e.g., private client groups, moderated live sessions), and community-based reputation mechanisms that enable rapid, locally legitimate remediation of reputational threats. Scholars should further examine how platform governance and algorithmic affordances interact with indigenous moral systems across varied Indonesian contexts, employing longitudinal designs to observe cultural evolution as digital economies mature.

Limitations of the study include a bounded sample in urban Makassar and the focus on those already digitally engaged; future research should include less connected traders, male comparators, and cross-regional comparisons to trace heterogeneity in moral adaptation. Ultimately, the study reframes visibility as an ethical practice: in Makassar's social commerce, showing oneself is meaningful only when tethered to values of humility, service, and family honor—demonstrating that dignity and digital markets can co-produce new forms of humanistic economic life.

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