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Between Algorithm and Adat: How Bugis-Makassar MSMEs Negotiate AI Marketing Through the Lens of Siri' na Pacce

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Abstract

The rapid proliferation of AI-powered marketing technologies in emerging markets poses a fundamental challenge to culturally-grounded micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs): how can algorithmic imperatives be reconciled with indigenous value systems that define not only business practice but collective identity? Despite growing research on both AI adoption in SMEs and indigenous knowledge preservation, scholarship rarely examines how traditional values actively mediate rather than merely moderate commercial technology adoption. This study addresses that gap by investigating how MSMEs in Makassar City, Indonesia, negotiate AI marketing integration while preserving siri' na pacce, the Bugis-Makassar philosophical framework centred on dignity (siri') and solidarity (pacce). Employing interpretive phenomenology integrated with Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR), the study conducted 23 in-depth interviews and three focus group discussions with 44 MSME owners and key personnel across traditional culinary, artisan craft, ethnic fashion, and digital service sectors. Template analysis generated four overarching themes: (1) value-based technology discernment, wherein siri' na pacce operates as an active epistemological filter for evaluating AI tools; (2) strategic selective adoption, wherein enterprises accept algorithmically aligned functions while rejecting culturally incompatible features; (3) cultural indigenization of technology, wherein AI systems are actively reoriented toward communal rather than individualistic ends; and (4) constrained agency under platform power, wherein algorithmic visibility systems penalise cultural non-conformity with market exclusion. These findings challenge technological determinism and advance decolonial computing theory by demonstrating that indigenous values simultaneously enable epistemological agency and are constrained by structural power asymmetries, a duality insufficiently theorised in prior technology adoption frameworks. The study calls for regulatory frameworks establishing indigenous data sovereignty, participatory AI co-design with local communities, and cooperative digital infrastructure as conditions for authentic, rather than performative, cultural integration.

Keywords: *AI marketing; Cultural Negotiation; Indigenous Knowledge; Siri' Na Pacce; MSME.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in Makassar City operate at a volatile intersection between ancestral cultural values and algorithmic market imperatives. These businesses, spanning traditional culinary vendors, artisan craftspeople, and ethnic fashion producers, are increasingly confronted by AI-powered marketing technologies that promise efficiency gains through data-driven personalization and predictive analytics (Larbi et al., 2024; ul Haq et al., 2025). Yet such tools fundamentally challenge *siri' na pacce*, the Bugis-Makassar philosophical framework governing commercial identity through dignity (*siri'*) and solidarity (*pacce*). In practice, *Siri'* demands honesty, competence, and reputational integrity across transactions, while *Pacce* sustains trust-based solidarity networks that have long enabled communal economic resilience (Darmayanti et al., 2025; Salassa et al., 2023). Algorithmic systems optimised for individual firm profitability risk eroding both: recommendation engines designed to exploit consumer behaviour may violate honesty imperatives, while automated personalization may undermine the equitable, relationship-centred norms through which *pacce* historically operates (Tella et al., 2025). This tension raises a critical question: how do culturally grounded MSMEs negotiate AI marketing integration when such integration appears to threaten the value systems that define not merely their business practices, but also their collective identity and moral legitimacy?

Existing scholarship addresses each domain in isolation but leaves a critical lacuna at its intersection. Research on AI marketing in SMEs documents significant performance improvements, enhanced customer engagement, demand forecasting, and cost efficiency (Larbi et al., 2024), yet predominantly employs technology adoption frameworks that treat culture as a background moderator rather than an active negotiating force shaping technology appropriation and resistance. Conversely, literature on indigenous knowledge and digital technology focuses largely on heritage documentation and archival preservation, with limited attention to how traditional value systems mediate commercial technology adoption in everyday entrepreneurial practice (Bawack et al., 2025; Salas-Pilco, 2025). This gap reflects a broader epistemological limitation: the presumption that AI systems are neutral tools organizations simply accept or reject, rather than sociotechnical assemblages whose meanings and ethical implications are actively constructed through situated cultural practice. The case of *siri' na pacce*-based MSMEs in Makassar offers an empirically rich site to address this gap: the values possess sufficient philosophical specificity to enable rigorous analysis of value-technology tensions; AI marketing proliferation is observable across Makassar's commercial landscape; and the MSME sector's structural significance contributes over 60% of Indonesia's GDP ensures findings carry practical policy relevance beyond their local context.

This study investigates how MSMEs in Makassar City negotiate the integration of AI marketing technologies while preserving *siri' na pacce*-based value systems, employing interpretive phenomenology to explore the lived experiences and adaptive strategies through

which owners navigate this cultural-technological interface. Specifically, the study examines: (1) how MSME stakeholders interpret AI marketing tools through indigenous value lenses, identifying perceived compatibilities and conflicts; (2) what decision-making frameworks they deploy to evaluate specific applications as acceptable or incompatible with cultural principles; (3) what adaptive strategies emerge to reduce value-technology tensions; and (4) how power asymmetries between global technology platforms and local communities constrain indigenous agency in shaping these negotiations. Theoretically, the study advances sociotechnical systems theory by developing a cultural negotiation framework that treats indigenous values as constitutive forces rather than passive contextual variables. Practically, findings aim to inform culturally-intelligent AI marketing design, guide policymakers supporting indigenous entrepreneurship amid digital transformation, and demonstrate that sustainable technological integration requires genuine negotiation between algorithmic logics and local wisdom, not the unidirectional imposition of globally standardised digital rationalities that risk displacing the indigenous knowledge systems sustaining communities across generations.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Template analysis of data collected through 23 in-depth interviews and three focus group discussions (comprising 21 participants) with MSME owners and key personnel in Makassar City generated four overarching themes illuminating how culturally-grounded enterprises navigate AI marketing technology adoption while preserving *siri' na pacce* value systems. The participant sample achieved planned heterogeneity across critical stratification dimensions: business sectors included traditional culinary enterprises (35%), artisan crafts (30%), ethnic fashion (22%), and digital services (13%); enterprise scale comprised micro businesses with fewer than 5 employees (43%), small businesses with 5-19 employees (39%), and medium enterprises with 20-99 employees (18%); AI marketing adoption stages ranged from non-adopters actively resisting technological integration (26%), experimental adopters testing specific tools (48%), to established users employing comprehensive AI marketing systems (26%); generational distribution spanned elder entrepreneurs over 55 years (22%), middle-aged owners 35-54 years (52%), and younger digitally-native entrepreneurs 18-34 years (26%); while gender representation included 57% women and 43% men, reflecting documented prominence of Bugis-Makassar women in entrepreneurship. Interview durations ranged from 52 to 95 minutes (mean = 71 minutes), while focus group discussions lasted 105, 118, and 127 minutes, respectively. Data saturation, assessed through meaning saturation rather than mere code exhaustion, occurred after the 19th interview and second focus group, though data collection continued through the planned sample to ensure comprehensive thematic development and variation capture across all stratification categories. The analytical process generated 412 initial codes,

subsequently refined through iterative community validation workshops into 18 sub-themes, which were further synthesized into the four major themes presented below. All participant names are pseudonyms, with demographic descriptors provided in brackets to contextualize excerpts while preserving confidentiality.

Table 1. Major Themes: Negotiating Siri' na Pacce and AI Marketing Technologies

Theme	Theme Title	Sub-themes	Core Description
1	Value-Based Technology Discernment	• Alempureng as truth filter • Pacce-based collective evaluation • Siri' requirements for transparency	MSMEs employ siri' na pacce principles as active evaluative frameworks for assessing AI marketing technologies, accepting tools that enhance honesty while rejecting those enabling manipulation or deception.
2	Strategic Selective Adoption	• Functional cherry-picking • Algorithmic resistance practices • Hybrid human-AI configurations	Enterprises selectively adopt specific AI functions aligned with values while rejecting incompatible features, creating customized technological assemblages that preserve cultural integrity.
3	Cultural Indigenization of Technology	• Relational overlays on automation • Community-oriented personalization • Cultural reinterpretation of metrics	MSMEs actively transform AI technologies through cultural adaptation, embedding pacce principles into algorithmic systems and reinterpreting performance metrics through indigenous frameworks.
4	Constrained Agency and Platform Power	• Market exclusion pressures • Algorithmic lock-in dynamics • Generational value tensions	Platform capitalism imposes structural constraints limiting MSME agency, with competitive pressures and algorithmic dependencies compelling technological conformity despite cultural resistance.

Source: author 2026

Table 3. Participant Demographic and Business Characteristics (N=44)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (%)
Business Sector	Traditional culinary	15 (35%)
	Artisan crafts	13 (30%)
	Ethnic fashion	10 (22%)
	Digital services	6 (13%)
AI Adoption Stage	Non-adopter	11 (26%)
	Experimental adopter	21 (48%)
	Established user	12 (26%)
Gender	Women	25 (57%)
	Men	19 (43%)

Source: author 2026

3.1 Discussion

The documented value-based technology discernment practiced by Makassar MSMEs fundamentally challenges dominant narratives within technology adoption scholarship, wherein cultural values are treated as moderating variables influencing adoption speed rather than as constitutive epistemological frameworks that actively construct technological meaning and functionality. The finding that alempureng, pacce, and siri' operate as sophisticated evaluative filters through which AI marketing technologies are assessed for ethical compatibility before adoption decisions extends theoretical contributions from decolonial computing scholarship, which documents how Indigenous epistemologies actively resist algorithmic colonization rather than passively succumbing to technological determinism (Blayone & Mykhailenko, 2025). Critically, this indigenous agency manifests not through wholesale rejection of AI systems but through discerning adoption wherein specific technological affordances are decoupled from embedded Western value assumptions and selectively integrated according to culturally-defined priorities, a process that McGurk and Caquard (2020) observe in Indigenous mapping projects but which remains undertheorized in commercial technology adoption contexts. The collective evaluation practices documented among MSME networks wherein technology decisions occur through “pace”-based deliberative processes further challenge individualistic assumptions embedded within TOE-DOI frameworks, which implicitly privilege entrepreneurial autonomy over communal accountability. This finding aligns with broader indigenous data sovereignty scholarship demonstrating that Indigenous communities operationalize data governance through collective protocols rather than individual property rights (Bawack et al., 2025), suggesting that culturally-appropriate technology adoption frameworks must recognize communal decision-making authority rather than presuming individual enterprise owners as sole technology gatekeepers. However, the finding also exposes a troubling vulnerability:

when MSMEs employ indigenous values as selection criteria but these criteria are applied to technologies whose design logic remains fundamentally Western, there exists risk of what (Ofosu-Asare, Y. 2025) term cognitive imperialism wherein Indigenous frameworks are instrumentalized to legitimate technological systems that ultimately serve extractive capitalist logics incompatible with indigenous flourishing, creating an illusion of cultural preservation while enabling deeper colonization through seemingly compatible surface adaptations.

The strategic selective adoption and cultural indigenization practices documented in this study illuminate a critical theoretical gap between indigenization and decolonization that recent scholarship increasingly emphasizes as essential to understanding authentic versus performative engagement with indigenous values in institutional contexts. As Legault and Bleau (2025) argue, indigenization involves adding indigenous elements to existing colonial structures, whereas decolonization requires dismantling colonial systems and restoring indigenous governance, a distinction directly applicable to understanding MSME technology practices documented here. The hybrid human-AI configurations wherein MSMEs manually override algorithmic recommendations to preserve relational commerce, deliberately introduce inefficiencies to maintain pacce-based solidarity, and layer relational practices atop automated customer engagement represent indigenization strategies that adapt AI systems without fundamentally challenging their underlying extractive optimization logics. While these practices demonstrate remarkable indigenous creativity and technological agency, critical examination reveals they occur within severely constrained possibility spaces defined by platform capitalism's structural power. The finding that MSMEs reject dynamic pricing algorithms to preserve equitable treatment across customers demonstrates principled resistance to algorithmic discrimination, yet this resistance operates tactically within systems whose broader architecture remains oriented toward individual profit maximization rather than collective wellbeing, which Couldry and Mejias (2019) identify as data colonialism's fundamental rationality that enables continuous appropriation to seem natural and necessary. Theoretically, this suggests that indigenous technology appropriation exists along a spectrum from surface-level indigenization (adding cultural content to unchanged systems) through substantial adaptation (modifying technological functions to align with values) toward authentic decolonization (redesigning systems according to indigenous ontologies), with Makassar MSMEs primarily operating in the middle range, wherein significant cultural adaptation occurs but fundamental power asymmetries remain intact. The community-oriented personalization practices wherein AI recommendations are calibrated to support collective celebrations rather than exploit individual vulnerabilities represent a particularly provocative form of what might be termed counter-algorithmic design attempting to subvert individualistic AI logics toward solidaristic ends yet the structural limitation remains that such subversion occurs within platforms whose economic viability depends on aggregating individual behavioral data for surveillance capitalism

purposes, creating an ultimately unsustainable tension between indigenous values and platform business models.

Table 4. Theoretical Synthesis: Indigenous Technology Negotiation Framework

Finding	Theoretical Contribution	Critical Limitation
Value-Based Discernment	Indigenous values as active epistemological frameworks, not passive moderators; collective technology governance challenging individualistic assumptions	Risk of cognitive imperialism: indigenous criteria applied to fundamentally Western-designed systems may legitimate colonization
Selective Adoption	Indigenous agency through functional cherry-picking and hybrid configurations demonstrates technology as malleable rather than deterministic.	Operates tactically within constrained possibility spaces; indigenization without fundamental system decolonization
Cultural Indigenization	Counter-algorithmic design subverting individualistic AI toward solidaristic ends; demonstrates creative cultural adaptation	Unsustainable tension: indigenous values conflict with surveillance capitalism business models underlying platforms
Constrained Agency	Platform capitalism structural constraints limit negotiation; algorithmic visibility systems compel conformity despite cultural resistance	Individual MSME resistance is insufficient; it requires collective action, regulatory intervention, or alternative technological infrastructures.

Source: author, 2026

The constrained agency theme exposes the most politically consequential dimension of this research: platform capitalism operates as a contemporary form of what scholars increasingly term digital colonialism or data colonialism, wherein corporate extraction of behavioral data and algorithmic governance of commercial activity reproduces colonial power dynamics through technological rather than territorial means (Couldry & Mejias, 2019). The finding that MSMEs face market exclusion when refusing AI adoption manifested through algorithmic visibility systems that penalize non-conformity represents what Tuck and Yang (2012) would recognize as settler moves to innocence: platforms frame AI adoption as neutral technological modernization while structurally compelling indigenous enterprises to abandon cultural values under threat of economic marginalization. This structural violence operates through what appears as individual choice (adopt AI or

don't), but which actually constitutes coerced accommodation to colonial technological rationalities, given that abstention means business failure. The generational tensions documented wherein elder entrepreneurs resist AI adoption while younger family members argue for conformity as a survival necessity illustrate how digital colonialism reproduces classic colonial dynamics: introducing economic dependencies that pit cultural preservation against material welfare, creating internal community divisions that weaken collective resistance, and cultivating indigenous intermediaries (younger digitally-native entrepreneurs) who internalize colonizer logics and advocate assimilation (Ali & Abdulla, 2024). However, interpreting MSME experiences solely through victimization narratives would itself constitute colonial violence by denying indigenous agency and resilience. The collective recognition among focus group participants that individual resistance proves insufficient and the expressed desire for collective action, regulatory intervention, or alternative technological infrastructures represents what Blayone and Mykhailenko (2025) identify as indigenous sociotechnical advancement, the capacity to envision and organize toward technological futures that serve indigenous priorities rather than accommodate extractive capitalist imperatives. Critically, this suggests that authentic decolonization of digital commerce requires more than culturally-sensitive AI design or platform diversity initiatives; it demands fundamental restructuring of digital economic governance to establish indigenous technological sovereignty wherein communities possess genuine power to refuse extractive technologies, demand system redesign according to indigenous epistemologies, and develop alternative digital infrastructures oriented toward collective wellbeing rather than shareholder profit maximization.

From a practical perspective, these findings carry profound implications for multiple stakeholder groups navigating the cultural-technological interface in emerging market contexts. For MSMEs themselves, the research validates selective adoption and cultural indigenization as legitimate strategic responses to platform pressures while simultaneously highlighting the precarity of individualized resistance, suggesting that sustainable cultural preservation requires moving from isolated enterprise adaptation toward coordinated collective action through MSME associations, indigenous business networks, or cooperative digital platforms that embed siri' na pacce principles into technological governance structures. For AI developers and platform providers, the findings demand recognition that genuinely culturally-appropriate AI cannot be achieved through superficial localization (translating interfaces, adjusting aesthetic elements) but requires fundamental algorithmic redesign wherein optimization objectives, personalization logic, and performance metrics are co-defined with indigenous communities rather than imposed through Western rationalities (Ali & Abdulla, 2024). This might involve developing AI marketing systems that optimize for community solidarity metrics rather than individual purchase likelihood, personalization engines that facilitate collective gift-giving rather than exploit individual vulnerabilities, or transparency mechanisms that make algorithmic logic culturally legible

through indigenous knowledge frameworks rather than technical documentation. For policymakers, the research highlights an urgent need for regulatory frameworks establishing indigenous data sovereignty principles, mandating algorithmic transparency and community consultation for AI systems deployed in culturally-grounded contexts, providing economic support for alternative digital infrastructure development (cooperative platforms, community-controlled data systems), and protecting MSMEs from algorithmic discrimination through platform governance regulations that prohibit visibility penalties for cultural non-conformity (Bawack et al., 2025). For scholars, this study demonstrates the necessity of decolonizing technology adoption research through epistemological reorientation wherein indigenous values transition from contextual variables requiring control to analytical foregrounds deserving theoretical elaboration, wherein research questions center on indigenous priorities rather than assuming technological advancement as inherently beneficial, and wherein methodological approaches honor indigenous knowledge sovereignty through participatory processes rather than extractive data collection.

Synthesizing these theoretical and practical dimensions, this research ultimately argues that the negotiation between Siri' na pacce and AI marketing represents a microcosm of larger struggles over whose knowledge systems, whose values, and whose visions of human flourishing will govern our increasingly algorithmically-mediated future. The documented indigenous agency in selectively adopting, culturally adapting, and collectively resisting AI technologies demonstrates that technological determinism, the belief that technologies follow inevitable developmental trajectories that societies must accommodate, remains empirically false: technologies are sociotechnical assemblages whose meanings and functions remain contestable, malleable, and subject to cultural reinterpretation. Yet the equally documented structural constraints limiting indigenous negotiation power reveal that technological possibility spaces are not infinitely plastic but rather shaped by political-economic power relations wherein platform capitalism concentrates control over digital infrastructure, algorithmic systems, and market access in ways that systematically advantage Western technological rationalities while penalizing indigenous alternatives. The path forward requires what Legault and Bleau (2025) term authentic decolonization rather than performative indigenization: not merely adding indigenous content to unchanged colonial technological systems but fundamentally restructuring digital governance to enable genuine indigenous technological sovereignty. For Makassar's MSMEs, this might involve transitioning from tactical adaptation within extractive platforms toward strategic development of cooperative digital infrastructure embedding siri' na pacce into technological design, economic models, and governance structures creating digital commons wherein algorithmic systems serve collective flourishing rather than individual extraction, wherein personalization enhances solidarity rather than exploits vulnerability, and wherein

technological advancement measures success through cultural resilience and community wellbeing rather than profit maximization and market share. Such transformation demands not merely technological innovation but political mobilization: indigenous communities building collective power sufficient to demand technological redesign, regulatory frameworks protecting cultural sovereignty, and economic resources supporting alternative infrastructure development. The ultimate contribution of this research lies not in documenting how indigenous MSMEs accommodate AI marketing within existing power structures, but in illuminating how their creative resistance, ethical discernment, and collective aspirations point toward radically different technological futures wherein algorithms serve humanity's diverse cultural visions rather than imposing Silicon Valley's singular extractive rationality upon the world's plural ways of being.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Makassar's MSMEs engage AI marketing technologies not as passive adopters but as culturally active agents who deploy *siri' na pacce* as an epistemological filter mediating every stage of technology adoption. Four negotiation strategies were identified: value-based discernment, selective adoption, cultural indigenization, and constrained agency under platform power. Enterprises operationalise *alempureng* (honesty) to reject manipulative AI features, redirect *pacce* (solidarity) to reorient algorithmic personalization toward communal benefit, and invoke *siri'* (dignity) to demand algorithmic transparency. These practices challenge technological determinism by proving that AI systems remain open to cultural reinterpretation. At the same time, the findings expose a critical structural limit: platform capitalism's algorithmic visibility systems penalise cultural non-conformity with market exclusion, meaning that observed adaptation strategies constitute tactical indigenization within unchanged colonial technological structures rather than genuine decolonization. Theoretically, this research advances decolonial computing scholarship by documenting how indigenous values simultaneously enable epistemological agency and are constrained by political-economic power asymmetries, a duality that prior technology adoption frameworks have insufficiently theorised.

The implications of these findings extend across three domains. For MSMEs and indigenous entrepreneurial communities, sustainable cultural preservation requires a transition from individual tactical adaptation toward collective mobilization, building cooperative digital platforms that embed *siri' na pacce* into technological governance and organising associations capable of demanding algorithmic redesign. For AI developers and policymakers, the evidence indicates that culturally appropriate technology cannot be achieved through superficial localisation; it requires granting indigenous communities genuine co-design authority over algorithmic logic, performance metrics, and data governance supported by regulatory frameworks that establish indigenous data sovereignty

and prohibit algorithmic discrimination against cultural non-conformity. For scholarship, the study underscores the urgency of reorienting technology studies around indigenous epistemologies as analytical foregrounds rather than contextual variables, and of adopting participatory methodologies that honour community sovereignty rather than reproduce extractive research relationships. Ultimately, the negotiation between *Siri' na Pacce* and AI marketing is a microcosm of a broader civilisational question: whether digital futures will serve cultural pluralism and collective wellbeing, or consolidate a singular extractive rationality. Answering that question in favour of the former demands not only technological innovation but structural transformation in who controls digital infrastructure and whose values govern algorithmic systems.

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