

## Cultural Values and Purchasing Decisions: A Phenomenological Study of Bugis-Makassar Consumers in Traditional Markets

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### Abstract

*This phenomenological study explores how cultural values influence purchasing decisions among Bugis-Makassar consumers in traditional markets of Makassar City, Indonesia. The research investigates the impact of two fundamental cultural concepts—siri' (honor) and pacce (empathy/compassion)—on consumer behavior patterns. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with 15 purposively selected participants and field observations in traditional markets. Using Colaizzi's seven-step phenomenological analysis framework, the study identified four primary themes: Honor-Driven Purchasing Decisions, Relationship-Centered Commerce, Community Solidarity in Market Transactions, and Collective Identity Preservation. Findings reveal that cultural values significantly outweigh price considerations in purchasing decisions, with participants prioritizing vendor relationships, community welfare, and cultural identity preservation over economic factors. The study demonstrates that siri' manifests through dignity-centered product selection and respectful bargaining practices, while Pacce influences empathetic purchasing behaviors that support community members. Multi-generational vendor relationships emerged as crucial determinants of consumer choice, creating alternative forms of economic rationality that prioritize social bonds over transactional efficiency. The research contributes to consumer behavior literature by providing empirical evidence of how indigenous value systems create resilient economic practices in traditional market settings. Practical implications include the need for culturally sensitive marketing strategies that respect traditional values and emphasize relationship building over purely transactional approaches.*

**Keywords:** Cultural Values, Consumer Behavior, Bugis-Makassar, Traditional Markets, Phenomenological Study

### INTRODUCTION

Consumer behavior research has increasingly recognized the profound influence of cultural values on purchasing decisions, particularly in traditional market settings where interpersonal relationships and community dynamics play crucial roles in commercial transactions. Traditional cultural symbols are closely related to consumers, their way of thinking, and their willingness to buy (Zhang et al., 2023). The intersection of cultural heritage and consumer behavior presents a rich field of inquiry, especially in communities where ancestral values continue to shape modern economic practices. Understanding how deeply rooted cultural principles influence purchasing decisions provides valuable insights into consumer psychology and market dynamics in traditional settings.

The Bugis-Makassar community of South Sulawesi, Indonesia, represents a unique cultural landscape where traditional values profoundly influence contemporary consumer behavior. Central to this cultural framework are the concepts of *siri'* (honor) and *pacce* (empathy/compassion), which constitute fundamental principles guiding social interactions and decision-making processes. *Siri* represents a responsibility to maintain the dignity in society and is historically entrenched in the cognitive psyche amongst the people, traditionally becoming a binding force on the moral values and social system (Wikipedia, 2025). Two of the most important cultural values for the Bugis are called *siri* (personal honor) and *siri-pesse* (communal honor), where a Bugis person must defend, maintain, and build his *siri*, with efforts varying according to context, including economic contexts (Praying for Indonesia, 2015). These cultural values create a distinctive framework for understanding how

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traditional communities navigate modern commercial environments while preserving their cultural identity.

The traditional markets of Makassar serve as vibrant spaces where cultural values intersect with economic activities, creating unique purchasing dynamics that differ significantly from modern retail environments. In these markets, transactions extend beyond mere economic exchanges to encompass social relationships, trust-building, and community solidarity. Cultures that prioritize collectivism may encourage consumers to make purchasing decisions that benefit their family or social group, while cultural values also shape product preferences (Clootrack, 2023). The phenomenological approach to understanding these purchasing behaviors allows researchers to explore the lived experiences of consumers as they navigate the complex interplay between cultural obligations, personal preferences, and economic constraints within traditional market settings.

Contemporary research in consumer behavior has emphasized the need to understand cultural influences on purchasing decisions, particularly in non-Western contexts where traditional values remain influential. Studies have shown that the complexities of a person's culture play a huge part in their purchasing decisions in both Western and Asian markets (Toppan Digital, 2023). However, limited research has specifically examined how the unique cultural values of *siri'* and *pacce* influence purchasing behaviors among Bugis-Makassar consumers in traditional market settings. This gap in understanding represents a significant opportunity to contribute to the broader literature on cultural consumer behavior while providing practical insights for businesses operating in culturally diverse markets.

This phenomenological study seeks to bridge this research gap by exploring how the cultural values of *siri'* and *pacce* influence purchasing decisions among Bugis-Makassar consumers in traditional markets of Makassar City. Through in-depth interviews with 15 participants and comprehensive field observations, this research aims to uncover the lived experiences and meaning-making processes that guide consumer behavior in this unique cultural context. The findings will contribute to the theoretical understanding of cultural influences on consumer behavior while providing practical recommendations for culturally sensitive marketing strategies that respect and leverage traditional values in contemporary business practices.

**METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative research approach with a phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences of Bugis-Makassar consumers and understand how their cultural values influence purchasing decisions in traditional markets. Phenomenology is a qualitative research approach that seeks to understand the individual meanings of lived experience, making it particularly suitable for investigating the complex interplay between cultural values and consumer behavior. The phenomenological methodology allows researchers to capture the essence of participants' experiences while maintaining the authenticity of their cultural perspectives (Lim, 2025). This approach enables the exploration of deep-seated cultural influences on purchasing decisions by focusing on participants' consciousness, meaning-making processes, and how their cultural values shape their marketplace interactions. The interpretive nature of phenomenological research aligns with the study's objective to understand how *Siri'* and *pacce* manifest in consumer behavior within the traditional market context of Makassar City.

The research was conducted in traditional markets across Makassar City, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, specifically targeting markets where Bugis-Makassar consumers engage in regular purchasing activities. Purposeful sampling is widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, with specific criteria including: (1) ethnic Bugis-Makassar identity, (2) regular shopping experience in traditional markets for at least two years, (3) age range of 25-65 years, and (4) willingness to participate in in-depth interviews. Purposive sampling (PS) is one of the most commonly used approaches in qualitative research across a wide range of scientific disciplines. A total of 15 participants were recruited for in-depth interviews, with data saturation achieved when no new themes emerged from the interviews. The sample size aligns

with established guidelines for phenomenological studies, which typically involve 5-25 participants to achieve meaningful insights into the phenomenon under investigation (Hennink et al., 2020).

Data collection involved two primary methods: in-depth semi-structured interviews and participant observations in traditional market settings. The most common methods of data collection are document study, (non-) participant observations, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups. The interviews lasted between 60-90 minutes each and were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia or the local Bugis language, depending on participants' preferences, to ensure cultural authenticity and comfort. Interview questions focused on participants' experiences, emotions, and decision-making processes while shopping in traditional markets, with particular attention to how cultural values influence their choices. Field observations were conducted in three major traditional markets in Makassar to understand the contextual dynamics of buyer-seller interactions and cultural practices. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Data analysis followed Colaizzi's seven-step phenomenological analysis framework, involving: (1) reading all transcripts, (2) extracting significant statements, (3) formulating meanings, (4) organizing themes, (5) developing exhaustive descriptions, (6) identifying fundamental structures, and (7) validating findings with participants. Ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality, and receiving approval from the institutional ethics committee before data collection.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The phenomenological analysis of 15 in-depth interviews revealed four primary themes that characterize how cultural values influence purchasing decisions among Bugis-Makassar consumers in traditional markets. The participants, consisting of 8 females and 7 males aged between 28-62 years, demonstrated consistent patterns in their purchasing behaviors that reflected the deep integration of *siri'* (honor) and *pacce* (empathy/compassion) values in their market interactions. The first theme, "Honor-Driven Purchasing Decisions," emerged from participants' descriptions of how maintaining personal and family dignity influenced their product choices and vendor selection. Participants consistently described situations where they chose higher-quality products or specific vendors to uphold their social standing, with one participant stating: "I cannot buy cheap vegetables that look wilted because it reflects poorly on my family's status." The second theme, "Relationship-Centered Commerce," captured participants' emphasis on long-term relationships with vendors over immediate economic benefits. All participants reported having preferred vendors with whom they had established trust relationships, often spanning multiple generations, and these relationships significantly influenced their purchasing decisions regardless of price variations.

The third theme, "Community Solidarity in Market Transactions," illustrated how the cultural value of *peace* manifested in participants' purchasing behaviors. Participants described instances where they made purchasing decisions based on empathy for vendors' circumstances, such as buying from elderly sellers or supporting vendors during difficult times. One participant explained: "When I see an old seller struggling to sell their goods, I feel *pity* and buy from them even if I don't need the items." The fourth theme, "Collective Identity Preservation," revealed how participants' purchasing choices served to maintain Bugis-Makassar cultural identity within the traditional market context. Participants reported deliberately choosing traditional products, supporting local Bugis-Makassar vendors, and engaging in culturally appropriate bargaining practices that reinforced their ethnic identity. Field observations confirmed these interview findings, documenting numerous instances of extended conversations between buyers and sellers that went beyond mere transactions to include inquiries about family welfare, community news, and mutual support.

The analysis further revealed that price considerations, while present in participants' decision-making processes, consistently ranked lower than cultural and relational factors. Participants demonstrated a willingness to pay premium prices for products from trusted vendors or to support community members in need. The concept of *siri'* manifested in participants' reluctance to engage in aggressive bargaining that might compromise their dignity or that of the vendor, with many participants describing a delicate balance between seeking fair prices and maintaining

respectful relationships. Additionally, participants reported that their purchasing decisions were often influenced by the potential impact on their social reputation within the community, with product quality and vendor selection serving as indicators of their social status and cultural values. The temporal dimension of these relationships emerged as significant, with participants describing how their purchasing patterns evolved as trust relationships deepened and how these relationships provided emotional and social benefits beyond the economic transaction itself.

## Discussion

The findings of this study provide compelling evidence for the profound influence of cultural values on consumer behavior within traditional market settings, particularly demonstrating how the Bugis-Makassar concepts of *siri'* (honor) and *pacce* (empathy/compassion) create distinctive purchasing patterns that diverge from conventional economic models. The emergence of "Honor-Driven Purchasing Decisions" as a primary theme aligns with contemporary research highlighting how cultural factors include values, beliefs, language, traditions, and social norms that shape how consumers perceive products and brands, and ultimately, their purchasing decisions (Cretesol Tech, 2024). The participants' emphasis on maintaining dignity through product selection reflects a sophisticated understanding of consumption as social communication, where purchasing decisions serve as vehicles for expressing and preserving cultural identity. This finding extends beyond simple status consumption to encompass a deeper cultural imperative where economic choices are inextricably linked to personal and familial honor, suggesting that traditional market transactions function as cultural performance spaces where identity is continuously constructed and affirmed.

The predominance of "Relationship-Centered Commerce" in participants' purchasing behaviors challenges mainstream consumer behavior theories that prioritize price and product attributes as primary decision-making factors. This finding resonates with research indicating that cultures that prioritize collectivism may encourage consumers to make purchasing decisions that benefit their family or social group (Cloorack, 2023), while simultaneously revealing the unique temporal dimension of Bugis-Makassar consumer relationships. The multi-generational vendor relationships described by participants suggest that traditional markets serve as repositories of social capital, where economic transactions are embedded within broader networks of mutual obligation and trust. This relationship-centric approach to commerce demonstrates how traditional cultural values create alternative economic rationalities that prioritize long-term social benefits over short-term financial gains, offering valuable insights for understanding consumer behavior in collectivistic societies where social harmony and relationship maintenance are paramount.

The manifestation of *pacce* through "Community Solidarity in Market Transactions" illuminates the empathetic dimensions of consumer behavior that are often overlooked in conventional market analysis. Participants' willingness to make purchasing decisions based on vendor circumstances reflects a form of embodied empathy that transforms economic transactions into acts of community care and mutual support. This finding contributes to emerging research on cultural empowerment and its growing importance among scholars and practitioners (Zhang et al., 2023), while also revealing how traditional values can create resilient economic systems that prioritize community welfare alongside individual consumption needs. The empathetic purchasing behaviors observed in this study suggest that traditional markets function as spaces where economic and social justice intersect, with consumers actively participating in informal systems of community support through their purchasing decisions.

The theme of "Collective Identity Preservation" demonstrates how consumption patterns serve as mechanisms for cultural continuity and resistance to homogenization pressures in an increasingly globalized marketplace. Participants' deliberate choices to support Bugis-Makassar vendors and engage in culturally appropriate bargaining practices reflect what contemporary research identifies as the complex interplay between cultural, technological, and economic changes and their relationship with consumer behavior (Scientia, 2024). This finding suggests that traditional markets serve as cultural preservation spaces where ethnic identity is actively maintained through everyday economic practices. The participants' resistance to aggressive bargaining practices that might

compromise dignity illustrates how cultural values create alternative models of commercial interaction that prioritize mutual respect and social harmony over purely economic objectives, offering insights into sustainable and culturally sensitive business practices.

The study's revelation that price considerations consistently ranked lower than cultural and relational factors represents a significant contribution to consumer behavior literature, particularly in contexts where traditional values remain influential. This hierarchy of decision-making factors challenges Western-centric models of consumer rationality and suggests that the complexities of a person's culture play a huge part in their purchasing decisions in both Western and Asian markets (Toppan Digital, 2023). The findings indicate that traditional market environments provide unique spaces where alternative forms of economic logic can flourish, creating opportunities for businesses to develop culturally sensitive marketing strategies that align with community values. The temporal evolution of trust relationships described by participants suggests that successful engagement with traditional communities requires long-term commitment to relationship building rather than transactional approaches, offering valuable guidance for businesses seeking to operate authentically within traditional market contexts while respecting and leveraging cultural values for sustainable commercial success.

## CONCLUSION

This phenomenological study has successfully illuminated the profound influence of cultural values on purchasing decisions among Bugis-Makassar consumers in the traditional markets of Makassar City. The research findings reveal that the cultural concepts of *siri'* (honor) and *pacce* (empathy/compassion) fundamentally shape consumer behavior in ways that transcend conventional economic rationality. Through four distinct themes—Honor-Driven Purchasing Decisions, Relationship-Centered Commerce, Community Solidarity in Market Transactions, and Collective Identity Preservation—the study demonstrates that traditional cultural values create alternative forms of economic logic where social relationships, community welfare, and cultural identity preservation take precedence over price considerations. The multi-generational vendor relationships, empathetic purchasing behaviors, and dignity-centered decision-making processes observed among participants reveal that traditional markets serve as vital spaces for cultural continuity and community solidarity, where economic transactions become vehicles for maintaining social bonds and expressing cultural identity.

The implications of this research extend beyond academic understanding to offer practical guidance for businesses and policymakers seeking to engage authentically with traditional communities. The study's findings suggest that successful marketing strategies in traditional market contexts must prioritize relationship building, cultural sensitivity, and community engagement over purely transactional approaches. For businesses operating within or seeking to enter traditional markets, understanding the primacy of honor, empathy, and relationship maintenance in consumer decision-making processes is essential for developing sustainable and culturally appropriate commercial practices. Furthermore, this research contributes to the broader literature on cultural consumer behavior by providing empirical evidence for how indigenous value systems create resilient economic practices that prioritize community welfare alongside individual consumption needs. The study's phenomenological approach has revealed the lived experiences of consumers navigating the intersection of tradition and modernity, offering valuable insights for future research on cultural influences in consumer behavior and the development of inclusive marketing strategies that respect and leverage traditional values in contemporary business contexts.

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