



Artificial Intelligence Sparks Controversy in Content Marketing for Local Skincare Brands in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT: This study investigates the controversy and public response surrounding the use of artificial intelligence in content marketing by local skincare brands in Indonesia. While the adoption of AI-generated visuals has enabled faster content production and participation in digital trends, it has also provoked consumer backlash over concerns about authenticity, emotional connection, and the loss of artistic value. The research employed a qualitative netnographic approach. Data were collected from viral campaigns, social media commentary, and digital community discussions on public platforms such as Instagram and X (Twitter) between January and May 2025. The findings reveal that although AI accelerates content creation, its widespread use leads to visual uniformity and diminishes brand distinctiveness. Furthermore, Indonesian digital audiences actively shape brand narratives, demanding transparency, ethical standards, and respect for creative human work in marketing communications. The study highlights the need for brands to balance operational efficiency with cultural sensitivity and authentic engagement to build trust and long-term loyalty in the digital era. The main implication is that successful integration of AI in marketing requires open communication and a sustained commitment to human creativity. These insights offer valuable guidance for practitioners and policymakers seeking to navigate the ethical and cultural challenges of AI adoption in Indonesia's dynamic beauty industry.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Content Marketing, Skincare Brands, Brand Authenticity, Digital Marketing, Netnography.



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INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology has transformed the landscape of marketing, with Artificial Intelligence (AI) playing a central role in this revolution. AI has fundamentally changed how companies execute marketing activities, from content creation and customer prospecting to the personalization of user experiences (Esch & Black, 2021). Global corporations such as Netflix aim to optimize their services and marketing strategies. For example, Netflix utilizes AI-based algorithms to recommend movies and series tailored to each user's preferences (Kurniawan et al., 2024), contributing to its status as the world's most popular entertainment app, with 169 million downloads in 2023 (Salsabila, 2024). Meanwhile, Meta, the parent company of WhatsApp, has launched AI-driven advertising features that empower micro, small, and medium-sized businesses to design and deliver ads through WhatsApp Business. These ads are then distributed across

Facebook and Instagram using more personal and targeted approaches, illustrating that AI adoption is increasingly accessible to businesses of all sizes ([Gerlich, 2024; First State Futures, 2024](#)).

Today, AI is utilized in a wide array of applications, from image and speech recognition to natural language processing and anomaly detection. AI systems are now capable of emulating human-like thinking in domains once considered inherently "human," such as creative work. For example, AI can write stories, compose music, create illustrations, and design promotional materials based on simple textual prompts, greatly accelerating the content production process ([Somosi, 2022; Haque et al., 2024](#)). However, this very advancement has sparked concerns that technology meant to assist human creators could ultimately replace them, raising questions about authenticity and the loss of the human touch in creative industries ([Timokhovich & Bulycheva, 2021](#)).

Within the creative industries, especially marketing and advertising, the rise of AI has caused significant disruption. Creative professions now face competition from algorithms that produce content in seconds. This rapid leap in technology has outpaced the development of regulatory frameworks and ethical guidelines, creating a grey area that fuels widespread social controversy ([Jiang et al., 2024; Telebenieva, 2024](#)). Studies emphasize that as AI-driven content becomes more common, societies and governments worldwide are challenged to adapt and ensure ethical use ([Rozhko & Pletnova, 2024](#)).

One such controversy in Indonesia centers on the use of AI-generated content in local skincare brand marketing. This phenomenon gained public attention on social media following the viral post by "Studio Tropik," which featured an AI-generated "action figure" in its makeup campaign. The AI-created image of a female "complexion expert" received sharp public criticism, with negative comments questioning its realism, authenticity, aesthetics, and the brand's professionalism. Several other local skincare brands adopting AI visuals encountered similar reactions. Netizens questioned whether AI-generated visuals could truly represent the values of aesthetics, empathy, and authenticity that have traditionally been the strengths of skincare brand communication. This mirrors global concerns, as scholars highlight that AI in marketing can both create new opportunities and deepen the gap between public expectations and brand strategies ([Schram, 2024; Gopal, 2023](#)).

The growing adoption of AI in marketing is not unique to Indonesia, but part of a global phenomenon that is widely studied. Recent research has found that while AI-powered personalization can build trust and emotional connections, it can also threaten brand authenticity and integrity ([Haque et al., 2024; Timokhovich & Bulycheva, 2021](#)). There is increasing evidence that AI-generated content and virtual influencers are often seen as more objective and data-driven, which can increase trust among certain audiences ([Gerlich, 2024; Nalivaike & Miliukaitė, 2024](#)). At the same time, scholars emphasize the risk of alienation and the erosion of the emotional resonance that comes from authentic, human-driven brand storytelling ([Mandung, 2024; Huh et al., 2023; Semenda, 2023](#)).

Research across sectors such as retail, banking, and digital media further shows that the effectiveness of AI marketing is tied closely to issues of personalization, data privacy, algorithmic bias, and consumer empowerment ([Mogaji et al., 2022; Tamilmani, 2025; Ding et al., 2024](#)).

Companies must navigate the balance between operational efficiency, hyper-targeted content, and the risks of ethical backlash or a decline in brand authenticity ([Somosi, 2022; Rozhko & Pletnova, 2024](#)). In the beauty and skincare industry, where consumer trust and emotional connection are essential, the use of AI in content marketing presents new challenges to brand reputation and public perception ([Jiang et al., 2024; Huang & Shen, 2024](#)).

In Indonesia, digital transformation is accelerating. Internet penetration reached 79.5% of the population, or 221.56 million users, in 2024, reflecting consistent growth over the last five years. Despite the positive trend in AI adoption, Indonesian companies are still developing their readiness, with only 19% considered fully prepared to leverage AI's potential ([Cisco AI Readiness Index, 2024](#)). As AI becomes more integrated into business operations, so do the challenges, including privacy violations, algorithmic bias, and the threat to creative employment ([Telebenieva, 2024](#)). Industry experts note that AI should be regarded as a tool for resilience and efficiency, not a replacement for human creativity and ethical consideration ([Nabila, 2024](#)).

These trends underscore the urgent need to investigate both the opportunities and challenges associated with AI-powered content in digital marketing. Scholars call for a nuanced understanding that blends technological advancement with ethical, aesthetic, and humanistic values ([Mandung, 2024; Telebenieva, 2024; Rozhko & Pletnova, 2024](#)). For Indonesian local skincare brands, these issues are not only relevant for maintaining competitiveness, but also for protecting the deeper meanings of authenticity and trust in the age of AI-driven marketing ([Ates et al., 2024; Nalivaikė & Miliukaitė, 2024](#)). Therefore, this study seeks to answer how the public perceives AI-generated content in the marketing of local skincare brands in Indonesia, and what the implications are for consumer trust and ethical values in brand communication.

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into marketing communication has sparked a fundamental transformation across industries, especially in the creation, delivery, and personalization of digital content. Scholars argue that AI-driven marketing tools enable brands to enhance efficiency, tailor communication, and engage diverse audiences on a previously unimaginable scale ([Sojáková, 2024; Kubovics, 2025](#)). For example, the Indian cosmetic industry has demonstrated how artificial marketing tools can influence consumer behaviour by streamlining customer journeys and personalizing promotional content ([Pandya & Padma, 2024](#)). In the broader context, studies in Ukraine and the USA show that AI has become an integral driver in the modernization of beauty and skincare marketing strategies, making brand engagement more interactive and data-driven ([Vladychyn et al., 2024; Gasenko, 2024](#)).

A central issue in AI-powered content marketing is the question of authenticity and consumer trust. Research reveals that the use of generative AI for social media content creation can undermine perceived brand authenticity. Consumers may view such content as less genuine compared to material generated by humans ([Brüns & Meißen, 2024](#)). Similarly, the effectiveness of influencer campaigns in makeup and skincare markets depends not only on the creativity enabled by AI, but also on the level of transparency and honesty presented to audiences ([Satur et al., 2024](#)). In the personal care and cosmetics sector, consumer trust in AI is shaped by cultural factors, with varying levels of acceptance and skepticism across countries like the UK, Ireland, and the USA ([O'Higgins & Fatorachian, 2025; Gasenko, 2024](#)).

Ethical considerations and data privacy are increasingly at the forefront of discussions on AI in content marketing. The rapid adoption of AI requires brands to address the ethical crossroads of personal data collection, particularly as algorithms rely heavily on user information to optimize targeting and personalization (Tamayo Salazar et al., 2023). Scholars stress that ensuring data transparency and responsible AI use is vital for maintaining consumer trust and meeting regulatory requirements (Morales, 2025). Furthermore, the rise of the metaverse and AI-enabled marketing strategies raises new challenges for ethical practice, including how consumer behaviour is tracked, analyzed, and potentially manipulated in immersive digital environments (Spais et al., 2024).

From a technological and creative perspective, AI is also revolutionizing the development of customized skincare solutions and the physical presentation of cosmetic brands. Machine learning and predictive analytics now allow brands to develop highly individualized skincare regimens, demonstrating the potential of AI to deliver precise, science-based recommendations to consumers (Hash et al., 2025). In parallel, AI-generated design is being explored for its applicability in physical retail environments, such as the facade design of cosmetic stores, suggesting that AI's influence is not limited to the digital realm but extends into spatial branding and customer experience (Hou & Song, 2024).

Finally, while AI in marketing brings unprecedented opportunities for innovation, researchers caution against overreliance on technology at the expense of human creativity and strategic oversight. Studies highlight the importance of striking a balance between algorithm-driven content production and human values, particularly in sectors where emotional engagement, brand storytelling, and authenticity remain crucial (Hussain, 2024; Cannella, 2018). As AI continues to evolve, brands that successfully integrate human-centric principles with advanced marketing technologies are more likely to sustain consumer trust, foster loyalty, and navigate the complexities of digital transformation (Morales, 2025; Kubovics, 2025).

METHOD

This study adopted a qualitative netnography approach to explore the dynamics of public perception, controversy, and cultural meaning construction surrounding the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in content marketing by local skincare brands in Indonesia. The methodology was carefully structured to ensure methodological rigour and contextual richness, consistent with international standards for digital and qualitative research.

The research utilised a qualitative, netnographic design, drawing from the foundational works of Kozinets (2010, 2020), who conceptualised netnography as a form of ethnography adapted for studying cultures, communities, and meaning-making processes in online environments. Netnography is widely recognised as an effective method for investigating how individuals and groups communicate, negotiate identities, and construct collective understandings through digital interactions (Kozinets, 2010; Kozinets, 2020; Langer & Beckman, 2005). This study selected netnography due to the research focus on digital discourse, user-generated content, and the unique nature of social media communities shaping opinions and responses to AI-generated content in Indonesia's beauty industry. The method enabled a nuanced exploration of interactions on

Instagram, X (Twitter), beauty-related forums, and community pages where conversations about authenticity, AI, and brand trust are actively negotiated.

The population comprised Indonesian digital users, content creators, beauty enthusiasts, and general consumers who engaged in discussions or reacted to viral campaigns featuring AI-generated content by local skincare brands between January and May 2025 ([Kunaifi et al., 2022](#); [Putra, 2018, 2024a, 2024b](#)). Informants in netnographic research are represented by digital artefacts (such as comments, posts, threads, hashtags, memes, and community discussions) rather than direct interview subjects ([Kozinets, 2020](#); [Kozinets, 2015](#)). Purposive and theoretical sampling strategies were used to select the most relevant and information-rich digital artefacts from public discussions ([Andriani & Putra, 2019](#); [El-Sa'ud et al., 2019](#); [Fahmi et al., 2022](#); [Putra, 2022](#)), especially those around major case studies (e.g., Studio Tropik's viral campaign, Derma Angel, and other notable brands). This approach allowed the study to capture both widespread sentiments and nuanced perspectives from a range of social and demographic backgrounds ([Langer & Beckman, 2005](#)).

The setting of this research was entirely virtual, embedded in the digital ecosystem of Indonesia's skincare and beauty market. The primary "field sites" were online platforms where public engagement with AI-generated marketing content was most active and visible. Social media sites such as Instagram and X (Twitter), along with beauty forums and discussion threads, formed the main loci for data collection. This choice reflects netnography's core principle that the locus of cultural meaning-making can be online, not limited by geographic boundaries (Kozinets, 2010).

The primary research instrument was a structured netnographic documentation protocol tailored to the goals of the study. Data collection relied on observational checklists, systematic digital screenshot archiving, simple categorisation tables, and manual content mapping frameworks. Sampling procedures were informed by established netnographic methods ([Kozinets, 2020](#); [Langer & Beckman, 2005](#)), focusing on the most relevant and information-rich digital artefacts from public conversations about AI-generated skincare marketing content. Researchers used digital tools to organise and record observations, ensuring a transparent and systematic process. Throughout the data collection phase, the team maintained reflective memos to capture contextual details, emotional tones, and emerging patterns observed within the sampled content. These tools allowed for clear documentation, efficient comparison, and straightforward thematic mapping of the digital materials, in line with recommendations for practical netnographic analysis ([Braun & Clarke, 2006](#); [Kozinets, 2020](#)).

Data were collected systematically over a five-month period (January–May 2025) by observing and documenting digital traces of public discourse, focusing on viral and highly engaged posts, threads, and comment sections. Following Kozinets (2015), the researcher actively monitored relevant hashtags (e.g., #StudioTropikAI, #SkincareAI, #AIBrandIndonesia), campaign visuals, and commentaries, as well as meme propagation and debates in beauty enthusiast groups. Digital artefacts were archived as screenshots or web captures, each tagged with date, platform, and context. The selection process emphasised "information-rich" episodes, posts or conversations with high engagement, diversity of opinion, and relevance to the study objectives. The process also

included periodic cross-checking to ensure the inclusion of emerging themes and the avoidance of sampling bias ([Kozinets, 2020](#)).

Thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006), was used as the main analytic technique. The procedure involved six steps: familiarisation with the data; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; and producing a final report. Data were imported into digital coding frameworks, and analysis focused on identifying patterns related to public perception of AI-generated marketing content, discourses of authenticity, expressions of trust or distrust, and broader cultural debates about technology and branding in Indonesia. Cross-comparative coding was conducted to identify convergences and divergences across different brands and campaigns. The iterative process included reflective memo-writing, triangulation with secondary sources (such as news articles and policy documents), and periodic peer debriefing to enhance credibility ([Braun & Clarke, 2006](#); [Kozinets, 2010](#)).

The research adhered to the ethical standards set forth by the Association of Internet Researchers ([AoIR, 2019](#)) and complied with the code of conduct for digital qualitative research. Only data from publicly accessible digital spaces were collected and analysed, in accordance with Kozinets' guidelines. No private, password-protected, or direct-message communications were used. Usernames, profile images, and any potentially identifying information were anonymised during data analysis and are omitted from all publications or presentations. The researcher observed the principle of non-intervention, collecting data unobtrusively without influencing ongoing discussions or altering the natural flow of digital interactions. Where screenshots or direct quotations are used, extra care was taken to paraphrase or aggregate information to prevent inadvertent identification, consistent with best practices for protecting digital subject privacy ([AoIR, 2019](#); [Kozinets, 2020](#)).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight the complex interplay between technological innovation, audience expectations, and cultural values in the use of artificial intelligence (AI) for digital content marketing among local skincare brands in Indonesia. The results, analysed through a netnographic lens, reveal multiple layers of negotiation, controversy, and meaning-making within both brand communications and public reactions, as demonstrated by the seven figures selected from social media and community forums.

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Figure 1. Public Reaction to the Use of AI-Generated Visuals in Cosmetic Brand Content on X.

Source: X (@anadolover, 13 April 2025; accessed 10 September 2025)

The controversy began with the viral campaign from Studio Tropik, depicted in Figure 1, where a Twitter/X post from April 2025 initiated widespread criticism towards the brand's adoption of AI-generated, action-figure-inspired visuals for product marketing. Users questioned why brands replaced traditional beauty photography with AI-generated cartoon images and called for more artistic effort and emotional resonance (Brüns & Meißner, 2024; Morales, 2025). The viral thread quickly accumulated extensive engagement, with hundreds of likes, comments, and retweets echoing the sentiment that the visuals failed to capture the empathy, warmth, and authenticity that are fundamental to beauty brands (Esch & Black, 2021). This public backlash did not occur in isolation but acted as a catalyst for broader industry debate, triggering an ongoing negotiation of what constitutes ethical and credible brand representation in the era of AI (Gasenko, 2024; Sojáková, 2024).



Figure 2. Studio Tropik's Action Figure-Inspired Product Visuals in Social Media Campaign.

Source: Threads (@studiotropik, 11 April 2025; accessed 10 September 2025)

Figure 2 presents the original Studio Tropik campaign post that sparked the controversy. The action-figure visuals, “Complexion Expert”, “Golden Goddess”, “Makeup Guru”, and “Commuting Queen”, were designed to engage Gen Z and millennial audiences through relatable avatars and interactive captions. This approach, while intended to foster playful identification and inclusivity, ultimately clashed with audience expectations around authenticity and artistic value (Kubovics, 2025; O’Higgins & Fatorachian, 2025). The campaign was perceived as distancing, with many consumers regarding the stylised, AI-generated aesthetic as an inadequate substitute for the emotional connection traditionally fostered by human-crafted imagery (Brüns & Meißner, 2024; Satur et al., 2024). The netnographic evidence from both the campaign and audience responses demonstrates that attempts at differentiation through AI can backfire, especially when they conflict with the community’s existing standards of credibility and empathy.



Figure 3. Instagram Post by Derma Angel.

Source: Instagram (@dermaangel_id, 2025; accessed 10 September 2025)

The phenomenon was not limited to one brand. As shown in Figure 3, other local skincare brands such as Derma Angel adopted similar AI-generated, cartoon-like visuals for their marketing campaigns on Instagram. This rapid uptake reflects a broader trend of industry-wide adoption and the normalisation of AI-generated styles in Indonesia’s beauty sector (Sojáková, 2024; Gasenko, 2024). However, it also introduces the risk of creative homogenisation. The proliferation of action-figure motifs and stylised AI content across multiple brands may erode unique brand identities, diminishing distinctiveness and confusing consumers about the brand values each company stands for (Spais et al., 2024; Hussain, 2024). Instead of fostering innovation, the mass adoption of similar AI-generated visuals signals a potential loss of diversity and originality in visual branding.

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Figure 4. Comments on Studio Tropik's Post.

Source: Instagram (@studiotropik, 2025; accessed 10 September 2025)

Audience reaction to these campaigns is further illuminated by Figure 4, which documents the real-time dialogue in the comments section of Studio Tropik's Instagram post. Here, a consumer's plea for empathy, "Don't use AI, please. At least have empathy as a brand", is met by the brand's assurance that "AI was only part of the creative process, the final look is a result of collaboration." This exchange reveals two key dynamics: first, that consumers are actively demanding transparency and ethical responsibility in digital content creation (Tamayo Salazar et al., 2023; Morales, 2025); and second, that brands are being compelled to publicly defend their creative choices and demonstrate the continued involvement of human artistry. This pattern is consistent with international studies that identify transparency as a non-negotiable element for sustaining consumer trust in AI-mediated brand communication (Brüns & Meißner, 2024; Satur et al., 2024).



Figure 5. Community Post on AI Usage in Brand Content Creation.

Source: X (@BangandiFPL, 13 April 2025; accessed 10 September 2025)

The wider community's response is depicted in Figure 5, with a post from X reflecting a sense of inevitability and resignation. The comment, "Now all the brands are heading there... Brand giants have normalised AI use. Hope artists can survive," signals not only acceptance of technological advancement but also growing anxiety over the displacement of human creativity and the future of creative workers in the industry (Vladychyn et al., 2024; Morales, 2025). This post encapsulates the double-edged nature of AI adoption: while brands benefit from enhanced efficiency, the broader social consequences, such as reduced opportunities for artists and content creators, are

increasingly brought to the fore by the online community ([Langer & Beckman, 2005; Gasenko, 2024](#)).



Figure 6. Instagram Post by Glisten Cosmetics.

Source: Instagram (@glisten_cosmetics, 2025; accessed 10 September 2025)

The international context is highlighted by Figure 6, featuring Glisten Cosmetics, a UK-based indie brand, which responded to the controversy by asserting a “NO AI!” stance and promoting original, artist-created visuals. The owner’s message, advocating respect for artists and transparent technology use, finds resonance with Indonesian consumer demands and underscores that debates over authenticity, artistry, and ethical technology use are global, not merely local phenomena ([O’Higgins & Fatorachian, 2025; Satur et al., 2024](#)). This figure affirms that the Indonesian case is part of a larger discourse about the cultural and professional impact of AI on creative industries worldwide ([Morales, 2025](#)).

Finally, Figure 7 offers a collage of AI-generated posts from several Indonesian beauty brands. The repeated use of action-figure aesthetics demonstrates the saturation of this visual trend and underscores the challenge brands face in distinguishing themselves in a market now dominated by similar AI-generated content ([Brüns & Meißner, 2024; Spais et al., 2024](#)). While AI brings speed and novelty, it also threatens to erode the authenticity and nuanced storytelling that underpin long-term brand loyalty and trust ([Esch & Black, 2021; Morales, 2025](#)).



Figure 7. Instagram Post by a Local Skincare Brands.

Source: Instagram (2025; accessed 10 September 2025)

In summary, the results of this study indicate that the integration of AI into digital content marketing has driven both innovation and controversy in Indonesia's skincare sector. The netnographic evidence reveals that public discourse is marked by active contestation, with consumers demanding empathy, authenticity, and transparency even as brands pursue operational efficiency and visual innovation (Brüns & Meißner, 2024; O'Higgins & Fatorachian, 2025; Tamayo Salazar et al., 2023). The adoption of AI-generated content is thus not simply a technical evolution, but a profound renegotiation of cultural meanings, professional values, and power dynamics in the beauty industry. This negotiation is visible in every layer of the digital conversation, from viral criticism and brand justification to broader community reflections and global parallels, making it clear that the future of digital marketing in this sector will depend as much on ethical sensitivity and creative authenticity as on technological sophistication.

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into content marketing by local skincare brands in Indonesia has triggered significant debate, public controversy, and shifts in industry practice. The findings of this study, derived from netnographic analysis of viral campaigns, social media commentary, and the evolving visual language of local beauty marketing, contribute important insights to the growing literature on digital marketing, brand authenticity, and technology adoption.

Interpretation of Key Findings

This study found that the adoption of AI-generated visuals by local skincare brands produced both innovation and public backlash, particularly when such visuals diverged from consumer expectations of authenticity, empathy, and artistry. The case of Studio Tropik's viral campaign, where action-figure-inspired AI visuals provoked widespread criticism, exemplifies how digital audiences in Indonesia actively contest the meanings and values attached to brand content. The criticism was not limited to aesthetics, but extended to concerns about the erosion of human creativity, the replacement of artists, and the perceived loss of emotional warmth in brand communication (Brüns & Meißner, 2024; Morales, 2025). These findings echo global research which demonstrates that while AI can enhance efficiency and engagement, it may also diminish

perceived brand authenticity and emotional connection ([Kubovics, 2025; O'Higgins & Fatorachian, 2025](#)).

Further, the rapid adoption of similar AI-generated styles across multiple brands, illustrated by Derma Angel and others, led to a homogenisation of visual branding. This saturation risks diluting the distinctiveness of individual brands and undermines the competitive advantage gained from creative differentiation ([Sojáková, 2024; Gasenko, 2024](#)). Such industry-wide trends reveal the double-edged nature of AI in marketing. While it facilitates speed and cost savings, AI also challenges long-held values of originality and storytelling that underpin trust and consumer loyalty ([Spais et al., 2024; Hussain, 2024](#)).

The study also highlights consumer demands for transparency and ethical responsibility. The dialogue between Studio Tropik and its followers on Instagram illustrates an emerging expectation that brands disclose the role of AI and uphold ethical practices in their creative processes ([Tamayo Salazar et al., 2023; Morales, 2025](#)). This aligns with international literature stressing the importance of transparency in sustaining consumer trust, especially as AI becomes more deeply embedded in branding strategies ([Brüns & Meißner, 2024; Satur et al., 2024](#)). Community responses captured a spectrum of attitudes, from resistance and disappointment to reluctant acceptance and concern for the livelihood of creative professionals ([Vladychyn et al., 2024](#)). The saturation of AI-generated content and the resulting anxiety about job loss for artists point to broader socio-economic challenges that accompany technological disruption ([Langer & Beckman, 2005; Gasenko, 2024](#)).

Comparison with Previous Studies

The findings of this research are consistent with international studies that highlight both the potential and pitfalls of AI in content marketing. Prior research by Brüns & Meißner (2024) and Morales (2025) demonstrates that generative AI can threaten perceived authenticity and erode the emotional bonds that brands have traditionally built with consumers. Studies in other contexts ([O'Higgins & Fatorachian, 2025; Kubovics, 2025](#)) also show that while AI-driven personalisation can foster engagement, it often fails to replicate the nuances of human creativity and empathy, qualities that are crucial in the beauty and personal care industry ([Fahmi et al., 2024; Kasmo & Sukardiman, 2018; Putra et al., 2024](#)). At the same time, the Indonesian context adds new dimensions to the debate. As documented in this study, public discourse around AI in skincare marketing is not only about efficiency or aesthetics but is deeply intertwined with cultural values, collective memory, and the symbolic meaning of beauty in a diverse society. The speed with which the controversy spread, and the level of consumer activism observed, reflect the participatory nature of digital culture in Indonesia, as well as the powerful role of social media in shaping brand reputations ([Morales, 2025; Tamayo Salazar et al., 2023](#)).

Practical Implications

These results offer important practical implications for marketers, creative professionals, and policymakers. Brands seeking to integrate AI into their marketing strategies must balance operational efficiency with ethical considerations and a commitment to authentic storytelling

([Fahmi et al., 2022, 2024](#); [Putra & Ardianto, 2022](#); [Rinaldi & Putra, 2022](#)). Transparency about the use of AI, investment in human, AI collaboration, and respect for consumer expectations are critical to building and maintaining trust in a digital age ([Satur et al., 2024](#); [O'Higgins & Fatorachian, 2025](#)). For the local skincare industry, the findings suggest that creative experimentation with AI should not come at the expense of authenticity, diversity, or empathy, values that are deeply embedded in beauty consumption and brand relationships in Indonesia.

For industry regulators and policymakers, the study underscores the need for clear guidelines and frameworks to address ethical concerns, data privacy, and the social impact of AI on creative employment ([Tamayo Salazar et al., 2023](#); [Telebenieva, 2024](#)). Collaborations among government, academia, and industry stakeholders can help develop responsible, inclusive, and sustainable models for AI use in marketing.

Strengths and Limitations

The study's strengths lie in its use of netnography, which enabled real-time observation of public discourse, viral content, and digital community engagement, capturing authentic reactions and nuanced meaning-making as they unfolded online ([Kozinets, 2020](#)). The analysis was further enriched by integrating visual data from multiple platforms and cross-referencing with recent global literature. However, several limitations should be acknowledged. The qualitative, netnographic approach, while rich in context, may not capture the full diversity of offline perspectives or less-visible digital communities. The study relied on publicly available data, potentially excluding private conversations or more nuanced opinions expressed in closed forums. The findings are also context-specific, focused on Indonesian skincare brands and their predominantly urban, digitally engaged audiences. Future research could address these limitations by incorporating longitudinal designs, quantitative surveys, or mixed-method approaches, and by examining AI marketing in other cultural or industry settings.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies should explore the long-term effects of AI-driven content marketing on brand loyalty, consumer trust, and creative labour markets. Comparative research across industries, regions, and cultural contexts would yield deeper insights into the universal and context-specific dynamics of AI adoption. Employing mixed methods, such as combining digital ethnography with quantitative consumer surveys or in-depth interviews, can offer a more holistic understanding of the interplay between technology, authenticity, and meaning in digital marketing. Researchers are also encouraged to investigate the evolving relationships between brands, human creators, and AI, and to track the regulatory, ethical, and cultural developments that shape the future of creative industries. In conclusion, the controversy over AI-generated content in Indonesian skincare marketing reflects a broader set of challenges and opportunities facing brands worldwide. The ongoing negotiation between innovation, ethics, and authenticity will determine not only the direction of the local beauty industry, but also its credibility and cultural relevance in the digital era.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the controversy and public response to the use of artificial intelligence in content marketing by local skincare brands in Indonesia. The main objective was to examine how Indonesian consumers interpret and react to AI-generated visuals within digital marketing campaigns, and to identify the implications of these perceptions for brand authenticity, consumer trust, and creative industry practices. The findings demonstrate that while AI adoption offers increased production efficiency and the ability to participate in emerging digital trends, it can also provoke backlash among consumers who perceive AI-generated content as lacking empathy, authenticity, and artistic value. A significant trend identified was the rapid, industry-wide adoption of similar AI-driven aesthetics, which led to a visual homogenisation that diluted brand distinctiveness. Another unique insight was the active and participatory role of Indonesian digital audiences, who openly voiced demands for transparency, ethical standards, and the protection of creative human labour in response to these new marketing practices. Notably, the study provided evidence that consumer expectations in the Indonesian beauty sector remain deeply rooted in cultural values, including authenticity and genuine social connection.

The results highlight several specific practical and theoretical implications for digital marketing in Indonesia's skincare industry. For practitioners, brands should integrate AI-driven content creation with a strong awareness of local cultural values, prioritising transparency, empathy, and creative collaboration to sustain consumer trust. For example, marketing teams are encouraged to openly communicate the extent of AI involvement in their campaigns and to recognise the role of human artists in maintaining brand authenticity. Operational efficiency must be balanced with the preservation of creative diversity and emotional resonance in content. For creative professionals, the findings underscore the importance of upskilling and exploring hybrid work models that combine human creativity with technological innovation.

On the policy level, industry regulators and policymakers are urged to develop clear ethical guidelines and frameworks for the responsible use of AI in marketing communications. This includes safeguarding data privacy, setting transparency standards for AI-generated content, and protecting the rights and livelihoods of creative workers as the industry adapts to rapid technological change. Theoretically, the study demonstrates that consumer perceptions of authenticity and trust are deeply influenced by cultural context and the visible role of human creators in branding, suggesting that future research should further examine these dynamics across different markets and creative sectors.

This study has several limitations. The qualitative netnographic approach provides deep contextual understanding but may not reflect the full spectrum of perspectives from less digitally engaged or offline populations. The research is limited to publicly observable content and focuses on urban digital communities, which may reduce generalisability to other contexts. Additionally, private conversations and more nuanced attitudes expressed in closed groups were not included.

Future research should employ mixed methods that combine digital observation with quantitative surveys or interviews. Broader sampling and longitudinal studies can reveal changing attitudes and a wider range of perspectives. Comparative research across industries and regions, as well as studies

on policy and labour market impacts, will further advance understanding and guide the development of adaptive, ethical marketing strategies.

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