Generative AI, IKS and Cultural Stewardship: Rethinking Ethical Marketing of Traditional Indian Products

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Abstract

Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) is having a transformative effect on marketing by allowing for the quick production of advertisements, product descriptions, images, and tailored communication with consumers. In the case of traditional Indian products, this brings about great potential in terms of achieving digital exposure but also poses an ethical issue: how can artificial intelligence be used to extend the market for products rooted in culture without distorting their history, meaning, identity or the interests of the relevant communities? This paper looks at the point where Generative AI meets Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), cultural authenticity, and the ethical marketing of traditional Indian products. By carrying out an integrated review of the existing literature on AI ethics, AI in marketing, cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and IKS, a Cultural Stewardship Framework is developed. The paper contends that while traditional responsible-AI principles such as transparency, fairness, accountability and human oversight are necessary, they are not enough when AI is involved with culturally embedded products; cultural authenticity, proper attribution, the avoidance of exploitation and stakeholder validation call for an extra level of governance. Hence, the paper suggests six layers: cultural knowledge grounding, AI generation, cultural screening, human governance, community validation and clear communication to consumers. It also proposes a Cultural Authenticity Index (CAI), which includes historical accuracy, cultural fidelity, community validation, creator attribution, AI transparency, non-exploitation and consumer clarity. The paper presents a conceptual route that connects IKS-grounded AI governance with cultural stewardship, perceived cultural authenticity, consumer trust and responsible purchase intention. Community validation is suggested to act as a moderating factor. The study makes a contribution to the fields of responsible-AI and ethical marketing by introducing cultural stewardship as a practical link

between technological innovation and the responsible commercialisation of traditional Indian products.

Keywords: Generative AI, Indian Knowledge Systems, Cultural Stewardship, Cultural Authenticity, Ethical Marketing, Traditional Indian Products

1. Introduction

Generative Artificial Intelligence has very quickly turned into a practical marketing tool. Businesses are now able to produce advertising copy, product descriptions, images, videos and social-media content on a scale which was once both difficult and costly. This ability is especially beneficial for small producers and for traditional companies that want to enter digital and global markets.

The case of promoting traditional products using GenAI is different from that of marketing ordinary consumer goods. Traditional Indian products can reflect regional identity, contain historical knowledge, have symbolic value, show craftsmanship and involve skills passed down from one generation to the next. When AI is used to produce the narrative or visual depiction of such products, the ethical question rises not only over whether the content is commercially effective or technically accurate but also as to whether the representation is culturally responsible.

Recent studies into the ethics of AI in marketing have identified authenticity and cultural sensitivity as growing issues together with transparency, fairness and accountability (Tshilemba et al., 2026). Furthermore, research concerning AI-generated intangible cultural heritage points out the importance of perceived authenticity and cultural identity in people's responses (Feng & Hu, 2026). This suggests that cultural representation should receive more attention in the context of responsible AI marketing.

Indian Knowledge Systems offer a valuable normative point of view with regard to this issue. They include the various Indian traditions concerning knowledge, values, governance, economics, the arts, and social responsibility. This study does not regard IKS as a substitute for current AI governance; rather, certain ethical principles are turned into practical questions for use in marketing: Is the claim accurate? Who is to be held responsible?

Could the way it is represented cause harm? Are the relevant stakeholders being treated fairly? Does the process of commercialisation contribute to broader cultural and social values?

The article describes cultural stewardship as the proper management of AI-mediated cultural representation in such a way that the commercialisation of cultural elements serves rather than distorts cultural knowledge, identity, attribution and the legitimate interests of concerned stakeholders. The study thus goes beyond the issue of whether AI can market traditional products and considers whether it can do so responsibly.

2. Problem Statement and Research Gap

GenAI is able to produce content that is culturally appealing at the same time as creating invented histories, wrong regional associations, stereotypes, inappropriate symbolism or exaggerated claims. An item may be accurately described as traditional but its origin, symbolism or artisan story might be given incorrectly.

The connection between IKS, AI and ethics is already beginning to appear in the existing literature, with recent studies having looked at Indian philosophical approaches to AI ethics, responsible AI and culturally based frameworks. It is therefore not the aim of this paper to assert that IKS and AI ethics have never been linked.

The main shortcoming concerns the inadequate operational integration of five elements: GenAI marketing, cultural authenticity, traditional Indian products, IKS-grounded governance and community validation. Most current research looks at AI ethics, IKS, cultural heritage or ethical marketing in isolation. This paper brings these areas together to form a practical framework for marketing governance.

The study addresses four research questions:

RQ1.What ethical risks occur when GenAI is put to use in promoting traditional Indian products?

RQ2. In what way can the IKS principles that have been selected contribute to responsible marketing of GenAI?

RQ3: What is the way of incorporating cultural authenticity and stakeholder validation into marketing governance that makes use of AI?

RQ4: In what way might culturally responsible marketing by generative AI affect consumer trust and the intention to make responsible purchases?

3. Objectives

1. To identify the ethical risks involved in the use of generative artificial intelligence in the marketing of traditional Indian products.
2. To assign the chosen IKS principles to these ethical risks.
3. To create a Cultural Stewardship Framework in order to carry out responsible GenAI marketing.
4. To suggest the development of a Cultural Authenticity Index and propose a conceptual model for future empirical testing.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1 Generative artificial intelligence and marketing ethics

There are concerns about transparency, consumer autonomy, privacy, manipulation, bias, and accountability in relation to AI-mediated marketing. Recent research has indicated that ethical marketing using AI also needs to take authenticity, human connection and social and cultural sensitivity into account (Tshilemba et al., 2026). With regard to traditional products, consumers often rely on marketing communication not only when making a decision about whether to buy a product but also in order to understand what the product stands for. As a result, inaccurate AI-generated narratives can lead to both consumer deception and cultural distortion.

The NIST AI Risk Management Framework stresses trustworthy features such as validity, safety, accountability, transparency, explainability, privacy, and fairness (Tabassi, 2023). The Generative AI Profile also points out the risks that are particular to generative systems (Autio et al., 2024). Although these frameworks form an important basis, cultural authenticity is not given a clear enough treatment as a marketing-governance aspect.

4.2 Artificial intelligence and cultural authenticity

The meanings contained in cultural heritage cannot always be conveyed through technical accuracy, and research into trustworthy AI in this field stresses the importance of contextual understanding, cultural specificity and interpretive accuracy (Paolanti et al., 2026). Feng and Hu (2026) show that there is a connection between the perception of authenticity and cultural identity and people's responses to AI-generated intangible cultural heritage.

This distinction is important for marketing purposes. Technical authenticity refers to whether the generated content faithfully adheres to the available data, while cultural authenticity concerns whether the output responsibly reflects the origin, meaning, practice and identity. An AI advertisement that is aesthetically persuasive may therefore be technically successful yet still culturally inappropriate.

4.3 IKS and Responsible AI

The ethical principles of IKS can be turned into governance guidelines, and this article looks at five of them: Satya (truthfulness), Dharma (responsible duty), Ahimsa (the avoidance of harm), Lokasangraha (social welfare and cohesion), and Nyaya (fairness and justice). Recent research has started to look at IKS in the context of responsible AI and AI ethics (Mukhopadhyay & Nadathur, 2026; Singh, 2026). Moreover, the work on organisational "Digital Dharma" shows that there is increasing interest in putting Indian ethical ideas into practice in order to achieve responsible AI adoption (Gupta et al., 2026).

What is being done here is to put these principles into effect by applying them to the marketing of traditional products using generative AI, rather than merely stating them as abstract ideas.

4.4 Traditional knowledge and commercialization

Traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions include knowledge, skills and practices which are passed on from one generation to another. Although commercialization may bring in income and increase visibility it can also cause worries regarding misappropriation, incorrect attribution and an unequal sharing of the benefits. The discussions at WIPO focus on issues concerning attribution, consent and the equitable sharing of benefits.

Traditional Indian product marketing therefore needs to take into account both the consumer and the people associated with the cultural knowledge that is featured in the advertisement; the appropriate stakeholder may be an individual artisan, a creator, an expert, a community or another kind of knowledge holder according to the product and the situation.

Table 1: Literature Synthesis and Research Gap

Literature stream	Main emphasis	Gap addressed by this study
AI ethics in marketing	Transparency, fairness, accountability	Limited cultural specificity
AI and cultural heritage	Authenticity and representation	Limited marketing focus
IKS and AI ethics	Human-centred and culturally grounded AI	Limited product-marketing application
Traditional knowledge	Attribution, protection, stakeholder interests	Limited GenAI integration
Ethical marketing	Consumer welfare and responsible communication	Limited cultural-AI governance
Present study	GenAI + IKS + authenticity + traditional products	Integrated operational framework

Source: Compiled by the authors from the literature reviewed.

5. Methodology

The study is based on a conceptual research design which involves carrying out an integrative literature review and the development of a framework. The four different literature streams were combined: responsible AI, AI in marketing, cultural heritage and authenticity, and IKS/(traditional) knowledge.

The analysis took place in three stages. In the first stage, the ethical risks associated with GenAI marketing were identified. In the second stage, certain IKS principles were matched to these risks. In the third stage, the principles were turned into operational controls, which led to the development of the Cultural Stewardship Framework, the Cultural Authenticity Index and the conceptual research model.

Since the study is conceptual, it does not include any claims regarding primary survey results or statistical findings.

6. IKS Principles for Cultural Stewardship

Table 2: IKS Principles and GenAI Marketing Application

IKS principle	Ethical meaning	Marketing application
Satya	Truthfulness	Verify origin, history and product claims
Dharma	Responsible duty	Assign human accountability for AI content
Ahimsa	Avoidance of harm	Prevent stereotypes and cultural distortion
Lokasangraha	Wider social welfare	Consider cultural and community value
Nyaya	Fairness and justice	Ensure appropriate attribution and treatment

Source: Conceptual mapping by the authors based on IKS ethical concepts and responsible-AI principles.

Mapping reflects how IKS can be operational rather than merely descriptive. Satya can become a content-verification requirement; Dharma can become an accountability requirement; Ahimsa can guide cultural-harm screening; Lokasangraha can guide social-value assessment; and Nyaya can guide attribution and fairness.

7. Proposed Cultural Stewardship Framework

The framework consists of six interconnected governance layers: cultural knowledge grounding, AI generation, cultural screening, human governance, community validation and consumer communication.

Table 3: Cultural Stewardship Framework

Layer	Key question	Control
Cultural knowledge	What information is being represented?	Verify source and provenance
AI generation	How is content produced?	Controlled prompts and verified inputs

Cultural screening	Is the output culturally appropriate?	Expert/cultural review
Human governance	Who is accountable?	Named human decision-maker
Community validation	Has relevant stakeholder input been considered?	Validation where appropriate
Consumer communication	What should consumers know?	Clear origin and AI-use disclosure

Source: Proposed by the authors.

The resulting process is: Cultural Knowledge → AI Generation → Cultural Screening → Human Governance → Community Validation → Consumer Communication. This represents a shift from "AI-generated marketing" to "AI-governed cultural marketing." Community validation should be proportional to cultural sensitivity; not every ordinary product description requires community approval, whereas culturally sensitive narratives or symbolism may require enhanced review.

8. Cultural Authenticity as A Governance Dimension

Cultural authenticity is defined here as the degree to which AI-mediated marketing represents the historical, cultural and social characteristics of a traditional product accurately, respectfully and transparently.

It has three dimensions: Representational authenticity concerns factual accuracy; interpretive authenticity concerns whether cultural meaning is communicated appropriately; and participatory authenticity concerns whether relevant creators, artisans, experts or knowledge holders have an opportunity to validate sensitive representation.

This framework extends conventional AI governance. Transparency can disclose that content was AI-generated, but transparency alone cannot establish cultural accuracy. Fairness can address unequal treatment, but it does not necessarily ensure appropriate representation of an artisan's contribution. Cultural authenticity therefore functions as a complementary governance objective.

9. Community-in-the-Loop Marketing

Most AI governance discussions use the concept of human-in-the-loop, where employees or experts review AI outputs. For culturally embedded products, relevant cultural knowledge may also exist outside the organization. An artisan may be better positioned than a general marketer to identify a subtle distortion in a craft narrative or motif.

The paper therefore proposes Community-in-the-Loop Marketing: incorporating relevant artisans, creators, experts or knowledge holders into validation when the cultural sensitivity of the content warrants it. This is not a universal approval requirement. Rather, validation intensity should correspond to cultural sensitivity.

10. Proposed Cultural Authenticity Index

Table 4: Proposed Cultural Authenticity Index

Dimension	Proposed weight
Historical accuracy	20%
Cultural fidelity	20%
Community validation	20%
Creator/artisan attribution	15%
AI transparency	10%
Non-exploitation	10%
Consumer clarity	5%
Total	100%

Source: Proposed by the authors; weights require empirical validation.

The CAI is a conceptual measurement tool, not a validated scale. Future research can test its reliability and validity through expert assessment, exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, and structural equation modelling.

11. Ethical Risk–Control Matrix

Table 5: Ethical risks and controls

Marketing activity	Risk	IKS Principle	Control
AI-generated history	False information	Satya	Source verification
AI-generated motifs	Cultural distortion	Ahimsa	Cultural screening
Artisan story	Misrepresentation	Satya	Creator verification
Personalization	Manipulation	Dharma	Human ethical review
Community knowledge	Exploitation	Nyaya	Attribution/consent mechanisms
Heritage narrative	Stereotyping	Ahimsa	Cultural sensitivity assessment
Traditional symbolism	Commodification	Lokasangraha	Context-sensitive review
AI advertisement	Consumer deception	Satya	Appropriate disclosure

Source: Proposed by the authors based on the literature synthesis.

12. Conceptual Findings and Discussion

The first conceptual finding is that cultural authenticity extends conventional AI ethics. Responsible AI principles remain essential, but culturally embedded marketing requires an additional question: does the representation respect the meaning and identity associated with the product?

Second, IKS can be operationalized through governance questions. The value of the framework lies not in simply attaching Indian terminology to AI ethics but in converting ethical principles into review criteria.

Third, community validation strengthens human oversight. Organizational reviewers may possess marketing expertise but lack specialized cultural knowledge. Stakeholder-aware validation can therefore reduce risks that ordinary content review may miss.

Fourth, cultural stewardship changes the objective of digital transformation. Traditional digital transformation emphasizes efficiency, reach and profitability. A culturally responsible model adds cultural continuity and stakeholder value. The relevant objective becomes: Digital transformation + cultural continuity + economic value.

13. Proposed Research Model and Propositions

The proposed model is:

IKS-Grounded AI Governance → Cultural Stewardship → Perceived Cultural Authenticity → Consumer Trust → Responsible Purchase Intention.

Community Validation is proposed as a moderator between IKS-grounded AI governance and perceived cultural authenticity.

P1: Transparency in GenAI marketing of traditional products is positively associated with consumer trust.

P2: Perceived cultural authenticity is positively associated with consumer trust.

P3: IKS-grounded AI governance is positively associated with perceived cultural authenticity.

P4: Community validation strengthens the relationship between IKS-grounded AI governance and perceived cultural authenticity.

P5: Perceived cultural authenticity is positively associated with responsible purchase intention.

P6: Perceived cultural authenticity mediates the relationship between IKS-grounded AI governance and consumer trust.

14. Future Empirical Validation

Table 6: Proposed experimental design

Group	Advertisement	Purpose
A	Human-created	Baseline

B	AI-generated without disclosure	Test undisclosed AI
C	AI-generated with disclosure	Test transparency
D	IKS-grounded and community-validated AI	Test cultural stewardship

Source: Proposed experimental design by the authors.

Future studies can measure perceived authenticity, cultural respect, trust, ethicality and purchase intention across the four groups. Studies can also examine different product categories such as handloom, handicrafts, traditional jewellery, regional foods and folk art.

15. Managerial and Policy Implications

Businesses should create verified cultural-information repositories containing product origin, production process, artisan identity, regional characteristics and cultural significance. GenAI should operate from verified inputs rather than unrestricted information sources.

Organizations should retain named human accountability for culturally sensitive content and establish review procedures proportionate to cultural sensitivity. Appropriate attribution of artisans and creators should be maintained. AI use should be disclosed where relevant to informed consumer interpretation.

For policymakers and industry associations, AI guidelines for cultural industries should incorporate cultural sensitivity alongside transparency, accountability and fairness. Digital marketplaces could develop voluntary provenance and authenticity standards. Training programmes could help artisans and traditional producers use GenAI while retaining control over cultural narratives.

16. Theoretical Contribution

The study contributes in four ways. First, it introduces Cultural Stewardship as a bridge between responsible AI and ethical marketing of culturally embedded products. Second, it treats cultural authenticity as both a consumer perception and a governance objective. Third, it extends human-in-the-loop governance toward Community-in-the-Loop Marketing. Fourth, it operationalizes selected IKS principles as practical marketing controls.

17. Limitations and Future Research

The study is conceptual and contains no primary empirical data. The CAI dimensions and proposed weights require empirical validation. IKS is diverse and cannot be represented completely by a small set of principles; therefore, the selected principles should be interpreted contextually. Community participation will also differ according to product type, ownership structure and cultural context.

Future research should validate the CAI, test the proposed model through consumer experiments, examine artisan perspectives and compare responses across different traditional-product categories and Indian regions.

18. Conclusion

Generative AI can provide traditional Indian products with powerful new opportunities for digital and global marketing. At the same time, its ability to generate persuasive content at scale creates risks of cultural distortion, inaccurate representation, stereotyping and inappropriate commercialization.

This paper argues that responsible GenAI marketing requires more than transparency, fairness and accountability. It requires cultural stewardship. By connecting selected IKS principles with responsible-AI governance, the proposed framework introduces cultural knowledge verification, cultural screening, human accountability, community validation and transparent consumer communication into the marketing process.

The central proposition is that the future of AI-enabled traditional-product marketing should not be measured only by how effectively AI sells culture, but also by how responsibly it represents, respects and sustains culture. Responsible digital transformation should therefore seek a balance among technological innovation, economic opportunity and cultural continuity.

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