



Constructing a culturally anchored visual identity for traditional culinary SMEs in Makassar through design thinking

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Abstract.

Traditional culinary SMEs in Makassar, Indonesia, face a critical challenge: competing in visually-driven digital markets while lacking a cohesive brand identity and legal business prerequisites. This study explores the "zero-to-one" visual identity development for a 20-year-old unbranded traditional culinary SME using a qualitative Design Thinking framework (empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test). Empirical data were collected through semi-structured stakeholder interviews, visual ethnography, and structured questionnaires distributed to 135 Generation Z and Millennial consumers in Jakarta. The design intervention developed the "Tallu Nona Nona" visual system, featuring a minimalist logo that simplifies the traditional Walasuji (interwoven bamboo) and the classic Lontara border. Quantitative user testing indicated high agreement across all visual design dimensions, agreement rates ranging from 94.27% to 95.88% based on Likert-scale assessments. Results indicate that integrating local cultural semiotics into contemporary design languages enhances brand recognizability and supports digital market readiness. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that establishing a formalized brand identity facilitates business formalization by supporting the Business Identification Number (NIB) registration process. This research contributes to the cultural branding discourse by presenting a structured framework for reinterpreting local heritage into modern visual systems to foster SME resilience.

Keywords: Visual Identity, Design Thinking, Traditional Culinary SMEs, Makassar Culture, Zero-to-One Branding

Introduction

The rapid acceleration of globalization and the increasing standardization of market practices have created a paradoxical need to preserve local cultural identities within brand communication. In Makassar, the cultural heart of Sulawesi, Indonesia, traditional culinary businesses face the critical challenge of competing in a globalized market while maintaining their cultural roots. One such business, which has been producing and selling traditional food products such as *Pisang Ijo*, *Jalangkote*, *Gogoso*, *Burasa*, and *Roko-Roko Unti* for over 20 years, has yet to establish a cohesive visual brand identity. Despite its longevity, this business lacks key branding elements, including a logo, consistent packaging design, and promotional materials. This gap in the brand's visual identity has hindered its ability to stand out in an increasingly competitive market, particularly as businesses must now also engage in digital commerce to remain relevant (Anugrafiyanto, 2025 ; Palimbong & Pasulu, 2021).

This condition reflects a broader structural issue faced by many traditional culinary SMEs in Indonesia. Traditional food products function not only as commodities but also as cultural artifacts that carry historical narratives, identity values, and collective memory (Hu & Cong, 2024; Pugra et al., 2025). However, without proper visual communication strategies, these cultural values fail to be

effectively translated into marketable brand assets. As a result, products with strong cultural potential often remain visually indistinct, leading to weak positioning in competitive markets (Pertiwi et al., 2025; Suherlan & Widiyanti, 2021). This creates an urgent contradiction between cultural richness and market invisibility, where traditional products risk being marginalized not because of their quality, but due to the absence of strategic visual identity.

The urgency of this issue is further intensified by the shift toward digital and visually driven consumption environments. In contemporary markets, brand visibility is no longer determined solely by product quality, but by the ability to communicate visually across digital platforms (Abolafia, 2025; Wibowo & Zainudin, 2024). Consumers increasingly evaluate products through visual cues such as logos, packaging, and brand storytelling before making purchase decisions (Ghorbani & Westermann, 2025; Shahwar et al., 2024). Without a clear visual identity, SMEs face structural disadvantages in digital ecosystems, where visual consistency and recognizability are critical for engagement and conversion. This situation indicates that the absence of a logo is not merely a design issue, but a strategic limitation that directly affects market access and competitiveness. Furthermore, the absence of a formalized visual identity creates significant administrative and legal barriers. In the Indonesian context, establishing a clear brand identity is often a prerequisite for obtaining crucial business legalities, such as the Business Identification Number (*Nomor Induk Berusaha or NIB*). Without this official registration, SMEs face restricted access to legal protection, commercial certification, and government-backed financing programs. Therefore, the lack of a logo and structured packaging design is not merely a marketing deficit, but a fundamental operational barrier that threatens the business's long-term sustainability.

From a theoretical perspective, visual identity can be understood as a system of signs that constructs meaning and mediates consumer perception (Barthes, 1972; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020). Within this system, the logo functions as the primary signifier that encapsulates brand identity, values, and positioning. Previous studies emphasize that visual elements such as color, typography, and composition do not operate independently, but collectively shape brand experience and influence purchase intention (Liu et al., 2025; H. Wang et al., 2023). Therefore, the absence of a logo represents a fundamental gap in the semiotic structure of the brand, limiting its ability to communicate meaning and establish recognition in both physical and digital markets.

In branding literature, a critical distinction must be made between rebranding and zero-to-one branding. Rebranding refers to the strategic modification or modernization of an already existing, formalized brand identity system (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006). In contrast, "zero-to-one branding" refers to the initial, foundational creation of a visual and symbolic identity for long-standing SMEs that have historically operated as generic commodities with zero formal branding assets (Wheeler, 2012). Traditional culinary SMEs that have operated organically for decades without a logo, standardized colors, or consistent typography present a unique challenge: the design cannot merely update existing visual associations; it must construct a completely new semiotic code that stabilizes brand meaning for the first time while honoring the business's decades-long organic heritage (Liu et al., 2025).

Direct interviews with the owner highlight the urgency of this gap. Despite strong local recognition and product quality, the absence of a distinct visual identity has created barriers in reaching younger, digitally native consumers. The owner stressed that the business relies primarily on word-of-mouth and has limited visibility in digital platforms. For long-standing culinary SMEs, long-term survival and business sustainability now heavily depend on capturing the attention of the next generation of consumers. This aligns with findings that Generation Z prioritizes modern aesthetics, visual storytelling, and symbolic meaning in their consumption behavior (Erlyana & Yi, 2026; Lauretta & Anggraeni, 2025). Furthermore, Gen Z consumers demonstrate higher sensitivity toward visual coherence and brand authenticity, making visual identity a decisive factor in engagement and purchase decisions (Huwaida et al., 2024; Ligaraba et al., 2024).

The lack of a strong logo and visual branding system therefore presents not only a design problem but a strategic and cultural risk. Without visual differentiation, this business is unable to effectively communicate its cultural value, compete in digital environments, or build long-term brand

equity. As previous studies indicate, visual branding is directly linked to perceived quality, brand preference, and consumer trust (Shahwar et al., 2024; Shukla et al., 2022). In this context, the development of a logo becomes a critical intervention that enables the transformation of cultural products into recognizable and competitive brands.

This study focuses specifically on the design of a new logo for this business as the foundational step in constructing a visual brand identity system. Unlike previous studies that focus on redesign or packaging optimization, this research addresses the initial creation of visual identity for a long-established SME that has never had a structured branding system. The research aims to explore: (1) how a new logo can be designed to authentically represent Makassar's cultural heritage while aligning with contemporary visual preferences; (2) how the resulting visual identity establishes a foundational language that bridges cultural preservation with modern market readiness; and (3) how this foundational design can strategically position the brand for future integration into broader digital ecosystems.

By addressing these questions, this research contributes to the existing literature by introducing a construction-based approach to visual identity, particularly in the context of traditional culinary SMEs. To achieve this, the design process is guided by a Design Thinking methodology, which provides an iterative and human-centric framework to ensure a systematic transmutation of local cultural values into modern brand aesthetics. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on logo creation as a primary epistemic and strategic intervention, bridging the gap between cultural representation, visual communication, and market competitiveness. This study therefore positions logo design not merely as an aesthetic output, but as a critical mechanism for sustaining cultural identity and enabling economic resilience in the contemporary marketplace.

To establish the scholarly context, Table 1 compares the current study with relevant recent literature on SME visual identity and packaging design in Indonesia.

Table 1. Comparison of Previous Studies on Visual Identity and Packaging Design for Traditional Food SMEs in Indonesia

Author(s) & Year	Focus of Study	Methodology	Key Findings	Limitations addressed by present study
Oktavianus & Erlyana (2024)	Rebranding of a traditional snack brand	Design Thinking	Rebranding increased visual appeal using local cultural motifs.	Focused strictly on rebranding an established visual system, not on zero-to-one construction. Did not link design to business formalization.
Wijaya & Erlyana (2023)	Rebranding of "Yangko" traditional pastry	Design Thinking	Redesigning existing packaging enhanced brand image.	Limited to packaging redesign within an existing identity; did not address administrative/legal benefits.
Cahyani et al. (2024)	Packaging innovation for village-level MSMEs	Qualitative (Interview & Observation)	Innovative packaging serves as an effective marketing tool.	Descriptive approach; lacked a structured design framework or systematic semiotic analysis of cultural motifs.
Agustina et al. (2025)	Digital branding strategy for local snacks	Qualitative Triangulation	Digital marketing constructs local brand identity.	Addressed digital promotions but did not provide a framework for translating physical ethnic motifs into digital visual assets.
Nurbina et al. (2022)	Redesign "Amplang" packaging traditional food	Design Thinking	Redesigned packaging improved aesthetic functionality.	Did not explore the integration of regional semiotic motifs or the systemic link to legal registration.

Source: Researcher's own analysis (2026)

As shown in Table 1, previous studies predominantly focus on rebranding existing identities or evaluating packaging functionality in isolation. A critical research gap remains: how to systematically synthesize regional cultural semiotics into a modern, minimalist visual identity system from "zero-to-one" to simultaneously resolve aesthetic invisibility, facilitate legal formalization (NIB), and capture the preferences of younger digital consumers.

To operationalize the visual analysis, this study integrates semiotic theory (Barthes, 1972) and visual grammar (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020). Cultural artifacts are not merely decorative ornaments; they function as a system of signs where the visual form (the signifier) communicates a deeper cultural meaning (the signified) to the consumer. For instance, the traditional Walasuji motif, which consists of interwoven bamboo forming a grid of rhombuses, iconically represents physical boundaries but symbolically encodes the values of cooperation, connection, and family ties in Makassar-Bugis culture. By applying a semiotic framework during the design process, the Walasuji is deconstructed and simplified into a modern geometric rhombus. This transition ensures that the logo functions as a shared communicative code between the designer, the business owner, and the contemporary audience, preventing cultural detachment.

Methods

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative Design Thinking approach, a user-centered methodology that emphasizes empathy, problem definition, ideation, prototyping, and testing in design processes (Brown, 2008; Liedtka et al., 2017). This method is particularly effective for developing visual identities and logos, as its iterative nature ensures alignment with both consumer preferences and business goals while solving complex design challenges (Huang & Hands, 2022; Pati et al., 2025; Verity & McCullagh, 2012). Ultimately, this research focuses on applying this framework to translate the intangible cultural values of a 20-year-old traditional culinary SME in Makassar, which currently operates without a brand identity, into a structured visual branding system.

Data Collection and Validation

Data collection and validation were systematically embedded within the five chronological stages of the Design Thinking process: Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype, and Test.

1. Phase 1: This foundational phase aimed to deeply understand the business context, consumer expectations, and the competitive visual landscape. Data collection utilized a mixed-methods approach:
 - Questionnaires and User Insights: Quantitative data was gathered through structured questionnaires distributed to 100 Generation Z respondents to evaluate visual brand coherence.
 - Stakeholder Interviews: In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the SME owner (to capture the brand's heritage and operational challenges) and a professional graphic designer (to provide an expert assessment of modern visual positioning).
 - Visual Observation and Semiotic Reading: Direct field observation was conducted at the production site to analyze the existing generic packaging. This was coupled with a structural visual audit of competitors to identify the lack of visual differentiation in the current market.
2. Phase 2: In this stage, the collected quantitative and qualitative data were synthesized to diagnose the core problem and formulate a strategic design direction. The analysis focused on identifying the gap between the existing physical signifiers (generic packaging) and the intended signified meanings (cultural authenticity). This phase extracted key local cultural philosophies to define the primary narrative pillars that would be integrated into the new brand identity.
3. Phase 3: Guided by the defined problems and cultural pillars, the ideation phase involved collaborative brainstorming to generate conceptual solutions for brand nomenclature and explore

how traditional artifacts and local ingredient colors could be visually translated into a modern design language that resonates with contemporary audiences.

4. Phase 4: Conceptual ideas materialized into tangible visual assets. This stage involved the systematic construction of the visual identity system, including the design of a minimalist logo incorporating cultural symbols, the selection of a typographic hierarchy to balance traditional character with modern legibility, and the formulation of a localized color palette. These elements were subsequently applied to comprehensive product packaging mockups.
5. Phase 5: The final visual prototypes were subjected to rigorous evaluation with key stakeholders to ensure alignment with business goals and market expectations. Qualitative feedback sessions were conducted with the business owner to validate cultural accuracy and operational feasibility. Concurrently, user testing was conducted with the Generation Z respondents to assess the brand's aesthetic appeal, cultural relevance, and perceived value to iteratively refine the final visual identity system.

Result and Discussion

Result

The application of the Design Thinking methodology facilitated a systematic transition from identifying structural business challenges to developing a culturally resonant visual identity. The tangible outcomes of this process are detailed according to the design phases.

Empathize: Understanding Users' Needs

The empathize stage in this study focuses on gaining a deep understanding of users, business conditions, and cultural context as the foundation for redesigning the packaging and visual identity of Tallu Nona Nona. This stage was conducted through multiple data collection methods, including observation, interviews, and questionnaires. Initial observations and stakeholder interviews revealed that the SME operated as a “non-brand” within a highly competitive culinary market. For more than two decades, products were distributed using generic packaging such as plain paper boxes and foil plastics without any visual identity, typography, or storytelling elements (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. The existing generic, unbranded packaging used by the SME prior to the visual intervention

Source: Researcher's documentation and visual analysis (2026)

This condition resulted in low visibility, particularly in digital environments where consumers especially younger audiences rely heavily on visual cues to evaluate product quality, hygiene, and credibility. Visual ethnography further showed that the absence of branding limited the SME's ability to compete and connect with modern consumers. In addition, insights from stakeholders highlighted practical challenges, such as the difficulty for customers to recall the brand and the inability of the business to meet administrative requirements due to the lack of a formal identity. These findings emphasize a clear gap between user expectations and the current condition of the product, particularly in terms of visual communication, brand recognition, and market reach.

Field observation was carried out directly at the production site on 27 December 2025, to examine the actual conditions of the packaging, production environment, and product presentation. The findings revealed that the current packaging is still very basic, lacking visual identity, branding elements, and differentiation from competitors. Although it fulfills its primary function as product protection, it does not yet provide added value in terms of user experience or visual appeal.

In addition, desk observation was conducted to explore visual references and cultural elements of Makassar, such as traditional motifs, colors, and symbolic forms. This process helped identify the potential of integrating local cultural identity into packaging design as a strategic differentiation.

Interviews with key stakeholders provided deeper insights. Interview with the business owner on 27 December 2025, highlighted that the absence of branding and visual identity has caused difficulties in building brand recognition and customer recall. The business currently relies on word-of-mouth marketing, with limited reach, especially among younger audiences. Meanwhile, on 29 February 2026, insights from a professional designer emphasized that cultural-based branding can serve as a strong and relevant differentiator when applied thoughtfully through simplification and modern design approaches. Furthermore, on 10 April 2026, input from a traditional textile shop manager reinforced the richness of Makassar's visual culture, including motifs and symbols that carry aesthetic and philosophical values, which can be adapted into contemporary visual design.

Table 2. Qualitative Validation Loop and Design Execution

Phase & Source	Stakeholder Feedback Received	Technical Design Execution / Adjustment
Empathize: Ibu Yanti	Expressed administrative difficulties in expanding and obtaining formal NIB registration due to unbranded presence.	Initialized brand naming "Tallu Nona Nona" and constructed a cohesive, formal brand system.
Empathize: Muhammad Ghossan	Advised that cultural elements should not be mere copy-pasted ornaments but simplified to avoid looking like "cheap souvenirs."	Performed geometric deconstruction and stylization on the traditional <i>Kristal Salur Baluk Tetong</i> motifs
Empathize: Kak Asri	Identified <i>Kristal Salur Baluk Tetong</i> used as a decorative element that imparts a distinctive and dynamic impression while reinforcing Makassar's cultural visual identity on the packaging	Integrated <i>Kristal Salur Baluk Tetong</i> as a repetitive horizontal pattern

Source: Researcher's research (2026)

Quantitative data were gathered through a structured questionnaire using a purposive sampling technique to evaluate user preferences and consumer perceptions of the proposed visual design elements.

Sampling Strategy and Participant Demographics

A sample size of 135 respondents was established, satisfying the minimum threshold of 100 required for robust descriptive and multivariate analysis in academic design research (Hair et al., 2010).

Participants were screened based on two primary inclusion criteria: (1) aged 20–40 years, capturing Generation Z and Millennials as the primary target demographic for digital products, and (2) residing in the Jakarta Metropolitan Area (Jabodetabek), matching the geographical expansion of the SME's digital delivery and gifting services.

1. Gender: Female: 57.0% (77 respondents); Male: 43.0% (58 respondents).
2. Age Distribution: 20–25 years (37.0%, 50 respondents); 26–30 years (25.9%, 35 respondents); 31–35 years (21.5%, 29 respondents); 36–40 years (14.8%, 20 respondents); Other (0.7%, 1 respondent).
3. Domicile: Jakarta (77.8%, 105 respondents); Adjacent Jabodetabek cities (22.2%, 30 respondents).

Measurement Instrument and Evaluation Methodology

The quantitative instrument consisted of a 19-item questionnaire measured on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ("Strongly Disagree / Sangat Tidak Setuju") to 5 ("Strongly Agree / Sangat Setuju"). Items were categorized into three principal research variables. Evaluation scores were determined by comparing the Total Actual Score against the Ideal Score, calculated using the formula:

Table 3. Summary of Consumer Perception Scores Across Evaluated Design Dimensions

Variable Dimension	Item Range	Scope / Dimensions Evaluated	Ideal Score (Total Items x Total Respondents x 5)
Packaging & Branding Perception	Items 1–5 (5 items)	Logo clarity, brand professionalism, and trust	3,375
Visual Elements & Cultural Integration	Items 6–16 (11 items)	Readability, layout balance, color harmony, and Makassar motifs	7,425
Digital Promotional Media	Items 17–19 (3 items)	Visual consistency in social media and digital ads	2,025

Source: Researcher's own analysis (2026)

Table 3 summarizes the overall measurement framework, benchmark parameters, and maximum achievable scores across the three visual design dimensions. To provide granular insight into participant response patterns, the itemized rating distributions—spanning from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree—alongside the weighted score calculations for each dimension are detailed below:

1. Variable 1 Score Distribution: STS ($0 \times 1 = 0$), TS ($0 \times 2 = 0$), N ($16 \times 3 = 48$), S ($107 \times 4 = 428$), SS ($552 \times 5 = 2.760$)
2. Variable 2 Score Distribution: STS ($0 \times 1 = 0$), TS ($10 \times 2 = 20$), N ($58 \times 3 = 174$), S ($236 \times 4 = 944$), SS ($1.181 \times 5 = 5.905$)
3. Variable 3 Score Distribution: STS ($0 \times 1 = 0$), TS ($2 \times 2 = 4$), N ($16 \times 3 = 48$), S ($78 \times 4 = 312$), SS ($309 \times 5 = 1.545$)

Empirical Results and Synthesis

The evaluation revealed strong positive consensus across all evaluated dimensions, with individual item scores ranging from 94.27% to 95.88% agreement. The results confirm that visual design elements—specifically logos, packaging layout, typography, and color schemes—exert a significant influence on brand recognition, perceived product quality, and consumer purchase intention.

Logos emerged as vital assets for building brand trust and conveying professionalism. Packaging attributes such as layout balance and visual harmony directly influenced perceived product quality. Furthermore, incorporating localized cultural identity—specifically traditional Makassar motifs—enhanced product uniqueness, aesthetic value, and brand recall. Supporting graphic elements, notably typography, reinforced legibility and visual appeal. Finally, social media was confirmed as an indispensable channel where visual consistency captures audience attention and fosters brand

credibility, demonstrating that integrating structured visual design with cultural heritage significantly strengthens product competitiveness in the digital market.

Define: Diagnosing the Visual Gap and Cultural Synthesis

The define stage focuses on synthesizing insights from the empathize phase into a clear problem statement and strategic design direction. In this study, the main problem was identified as the absence of a visual identity system, which resulted in weak brand recognition, limited market competitiveness, and administrative constraints for business formalization.

Crucially, the absence of a registered brand name and logo prevented the SME from fulfilling the administrative requirements to obtain a Business Identification Number (Nomor Induk Berusaha or NIB). This condition highlights not only issues of market invisibility but also legal vulnerability, which further limits the business's growth potential.

To address this dual issue, the define phase formulates a conceptual foundation by extracting and synthesizing intangible local values into a strategic design direction. Through qualitative analysis, key cultural values of Makassar were identified and translated into three core identity pillars:

1. Siri' na Pacce (integrity and empathy), representing authenticity and quality in the product
2. Maritime Heritage, symbolizing resilience and connectivity
3. Courage and Assertiveness, reflected in bold and confident visual expression

These pillars serve as the basis for developing a culturally grounded visual identity. Thus, the define stage not only diagnoses the core issue but also transforms research insights into a focused design strategy that integrates branding, cultural storytelling, and market relevance.

Ideate: The Conception of "Tallu Nona Nona"

Guided by the cultural pillars, the ideation phase utilized mind-mapping and collaborative brainstorming to construct a brand nomenclature that resonated emotionally and commercially. This process culminated in the name "Tallu Nona Nona." Linguistically, "Tallu" translates to "three" in the traditional Lontara language, while "Nona Nona" represents "sisters" or young women. Rather than adopting a generic geographical name, this nomenclature conceptually anchors the brand as a family-owned heritage business. It positions the culinary products as a legacy of traditional home-cooked craftsmanship maintained by three sisters, establishing an intimate and authentic brand persona that appeals to consumers seeking genuine cultural experiences.

Prototype: Constructing the Visual Semiotics

The conceptual narrative was translated into tangible visual assets, starting with an exploration of the unique weaving pattern from Makassar. The prototyping phase commenced with a series of manual sketches aimed at exploring the visual translation of Makassar's weaving pattern (see Figure 2). This iterative process focused on the geometric deconstruction of the Makassar's weaving forms *Kristal Salur Baluk Tetong*. By isolating the characteristic shape of the weaving pattern, the design evolved from a literal representation into a stylized, minimalist signifier. This transition from manual ideation to digital vectorization ensured that the final logo maintained its organic cultural roots while achieving the high-contrast, modern aesthetic required for contemporary brand recognition.

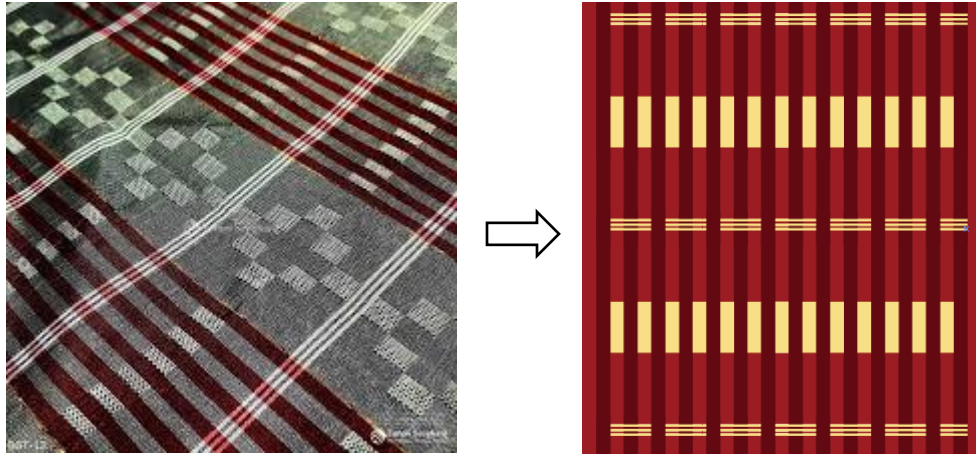


Figure 2. Manual sketches and digital iterations illustrating the transformation of traditional weaving into the minimalist pattern

Source: Instagram @tenun_sengkang, accessed 16 April 2026, used with permission; Authors' documentation and visual analysis (2026)

1. These preparatory iterations culminated in a cohesive identity system:
The final primary logo adopts a minimalist visual language to establish a premium brand perception, deliberately contrasting with the visually complex and cluttered aesthetics typical of traditional local markets (see Figure 3). Rather than relying on superficial ornamentation, the design achieves cultural resonance through form simplification and abstraction, retaining the core visual character of Bugis-Makassar heritage while ensuring contemporary digital adaptability.
2. The logo's structural morphology seamlessly integrates two main cultural signifiers:
 - a. The Lontara Decorative Frame: As illustrated in Figure 4, the outer border draws direct inspiration from the ornamental margins of ancient Lontara manuscripts. This element evokes an elegant, classic visual language that firmly anchors the brand within Makassar's rich historical narrative.
 - b. The Walasuji Geometric Abstraction: The stylized rhombus incorporated into the letter 'O' derives from the Walasuji (interwoven bamboo grid)—a traditional Bugis-Makassar motif representing sacred geometry, social harmony, and interconnectedness. In this design context, the geometric motif serves as a signifier for the close emotional bond, shared heritage, and strategic collaboration among the three sisters (Tallu Nona Nona).

The visual system utilizes an ingredient-derived color palette comprising Pandan Green, Santan White, and Sirup Ambon Red. Red and green serve as the primary brand colors, directly echoing the visual attributes of authentic culinary ingredients. By translating taste profiles into an evocative color palette, the logo intrinsically links the visual identity to the tactile and sensory experience of traditional delicacies, bridging cultural symbolism with modern market readiness.



Figure 3. The primary logo of "Tallu Nona Nona," featuring the rhombus semiotic intervention

Source: Researcher's documentation and visual analysis (2026)



Figure 4. The reference used for primary logo of Tallu Nona Nona

Source: Gunarta, accessed 25 July 2026, via Wikimedia Commons & Facebook @Sainal Aripin, accessed 25 July 2026, used with permission; processed by author. (2026)

3. Typographic Hierarchy and Font Selection

To balance cultural heritage nuances with contemporary legibility, a curated typographic strategy was established utilizing a distinct three-tier font hierarchy:

- a. Belagak (Primary Display Font): Selected as the primary display typeface, Belagak features sharp, expressive serifs and fluid, high-contrast curves. Its expressive, classic-modern visual character reflects the bold and assertive nature of the Makassar cultural identity (siri' na pacce). It is utilized exclusively for primary headings to capture immediate visual attention.
- b. Lato (Secondary Body Font): Serving as the secondary typeface, Lato is a clean, neutral, and highly legible geometric sans-serif. It counteracts the visual weight of the primary display font to ensure maximum functional readability across both physical print and digital screens, specifically for administrative and instructional copy such as storage directions and ingredient listings.
- c. Chennai (Logotype Font): Applied exclusively to the primary "Tallu Nona Nona" logotype, Chennai is a rounded sans-serif typeface engineered for high recognizability and structural balance at various scales. Its friendly, rounded terminals soften the sharp contrast of the Belagak display font and geometric borders, projecting a welcoming, artisanal, yet highly professional brand persona.

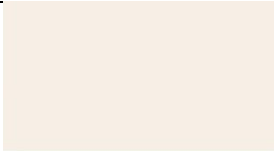


Figure 5. The typographic hierarchy showcasing Belagak (display font), Chennai (logotype), and Lato (secondary font)

Source: Researcher's documentation and visual analysis (2026)

- 4. Localized Color Palette: Color selection bypassed standard commercial palettes in favor of culturally and gastronomically grounded hues. The brand's color palette was extracted directly from the primary ingredients of Makassar's traditional culinary ecosystem (see Table 4). The psychological and cultural mapping includes Pandan Green (representing natural freshness and local flora), Coconut Milk White (symbolizing purity and savory richness), Ambon Syrup Red (evoking appetite and festive vibrancy), and Banana Yellow (highlighting the core ingredient of *Pisang Ijo*).

Table 4. The localized color palette extracted from traditional food ingredients

Reference	Color
Pandan Leaf 	 PANTONE® 19-6050 TCX Eden
Coconut Cream 	 PANTONE® 11-0610 TSX Silence
Ambon syrup 	 PANTONE® 18-1553 TCX Adrenaline Rush
Banana 	 PANTONE® 12-0727 TCX Sunshine

Source: Researcher's own analysis (2026)

These elements collectively establish a robust epistemic and visual identity system, serving as the strategic foundation for future applications. The practical visualization of this complete branding system was achieved through comprehensive product packaging mockups (see Figure 6)

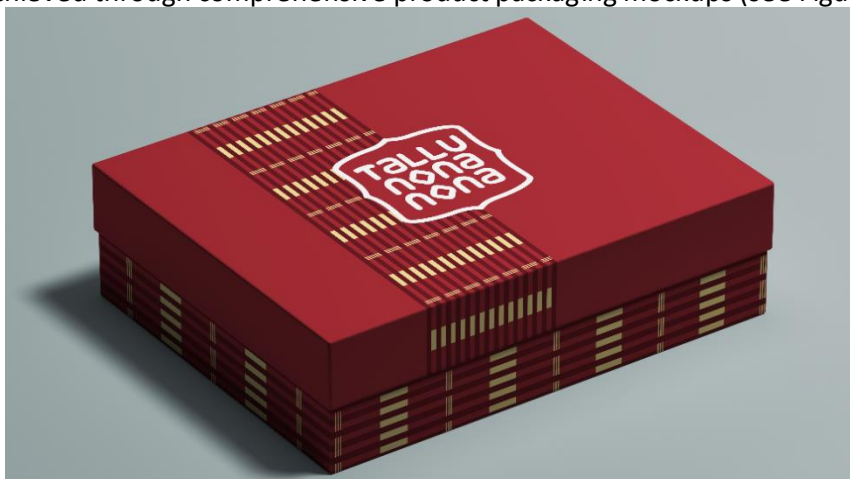


Figure 6. The application of the new visual identity system on product packaging
Source: Researcher's documentation and visual analysis (2026)

In Figure 6, the packaging mockups utilize an inverse (negative) application of the logo (white on a solid color block background) rather than the default primary colors. This strategic variation is implemented to maintain optimal visual contrast and readability against different background materials.

Applying the standard multi-colored logo directly to these saturated backgrounds would result in poor legibility and visual clutter. Under the rules established in the Graphic Standard Manual (GSM), the inverse logo is a permitted variation designed to preserve brand recognition and aesthetic consistency across diverse production materials while ensuring the central rhombus and Lontara border remain highly visible to the consumer.

Test: Validation and Market Readiness

The final visual prototypes were subjected to rigorous qualitative evaluation involving the primary stakeholders and the target market. The results of this validation process, synthesized across key design and operational parameters, are detailed in Table 2.

Table 5. Summary of qualitative validation and user testing results

Evaluation Parameter	Target Group	Key Feedback & Validation Results	Design Implication
Cultural Accuracy	SME Owner	The rhombus symbol effectively represents Burasa and Roko-roko Unti without being overly literal.	Maintained as the primary brand signifier.
Operational Feasibility	SME Owner	The packaging dimensions and material choices are cost-effective and easy to assemble for daily production.	Design finalized for immediate production.
Legal Compliance	Stakeholder	The formalized name and logo successfully met the administrative criteria for NIB registration.	Legal barrier resolved; SME achieved formal status.
Visual Appeal & Recognition	Generation Z	The minimalist aesthetic and bold typography (Belagak) distinguish the brand from generic competitors.	High brand recall and premium perception achieved.
Cultural Relevance	Generation Z	The ingredient-based color palette (Pandan, Coconut, etc.) creates a modern yet authentic "home-cooked" feel.	Validated the "modern-traditional" bridge concept.

Source: Researcher’s own analysis (2026)

Based on the synthesis in Table 5, the SME owner validated the cultural accuracy of the symbols and confirmed the operational feasibility of the packaging designs for daily production. Crucially, the formalization of the logo and brand name empowered the SME to successfully meet the strict administrative criteria for NIB registration, effectively neutralizing the legal barrier identified in the *Empathize* phase.

Furthermore, user feedback sessions with the Generation Z focus group evaluated the design's resonance with contemporary audiences. Participants confirmed high brand recognition, noting that the clean aesthetic and minimalist typography elevated the traditional products' perceived value compared to unbranded alternatives. The semiotic integration, specifically the rhombus shape and the ingredient-based color palette, was praised for its cultural relevance. These findings prove that the identity system successfully translated deep-rooted local heritage into an engaging, modern visual language tailored for contemporary consumption.

Discussion

The creation of the "Tallu Nona Nona" visual identity system reveals significant insights into the intersection of cultural preservation, modern brand strategy, and SME development in emerging

markets. The findings from this study demonstrate that for long-established "non-brand" SMEs, visual identity construction is not merely a cosmetic exercise, but a fundamental epistemic and structural intervention that mediates consumer perception (Barthes, 1972; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020). More critically, the empirical data obtained from interviews, observations, and questionnaire results indicate that prior to the design intervention, the absence of a visual system caused ambiguity in meaning-making among consumers, where the product was recognized functionally but lacked symbolic differentiation. This condition reflects a semiotic gap between signifier (product appearance) and signified (cultural value), which reinforces the argument that visual identity serves as a necessary mediator in stabilizing meaning within market contexts.

From a theoretical perspective, drawing upon the principles of Brand Identity (Wheeler, 2012), the results confirm that visual identity acts as a semiotic vessel for brand personality. The integration of local culture, specifically through the geometric pattern motif inspired by *Kristal Salur Baluk Tetong* and the ingredient-derived color palette, shifts the brand's symbolic dimension from generic traditionalism to meaningful cultural storytelling. This process treats the culinary product not just as a commodity, but as a marketable cultural artifact carrying historical narratives (Celhay et al., 2020; Hu & Cong, 2024; Abror et al., (2024). From a semiotic analysis perspective, the geometric motif functions as an iconic and symbolic sign simultaneously: iconically representing the visual structure of traditional Makassar patterns, while symbolically encoding values of continuity, craftsmanship, and local identity. This layered meaning construction demonstrates how design elements actively produce meaning rather than merely decorate the product.

The successful application of the five-stage Design Thinking framework in this study aligns with previous findings in the development of local food products in Wonogiri (Lie & Erlyana, 2024) and the rebranding of Srikandi Coffee in Bali (Erlyana & Jeremy, 2023). These studies confirm that iterative stages, from empathize to test, ensure that the resulting design is not only aesthetically pleasing but also fosters an emotional connection between the brand owner and the trademark (Erlyana & Jeremy, 2023). Unlike previous studies in the Indonesian context that predominantly focused on rebranding strategies for existing visual identities (Oktavianus & Erlyana, 2024; Wijaya & Erlyana, 2022), this research highlights that constructing a brand identity from zero ("zero-to-one branding") for a 20-year-old business requires a deeper semiotic integration of local heritage to prevent cultural detachment (Liu et al., 2025; L. Wang & Naeim, 2023). Empirically, this is supported by the transformation observed in stakeholder perception, where both the business owner and consumers began to reinterpret the product not only as food, but as a representation of Makassar culture. This indicates that the design process successfully recontextualizes meaning through iterative validation, aligning user perception with intended brand narratives.

Furthermore, the positive response from the Generation Z focus group underscores the necessity of visual transmutation in sustaining cultural heritage. Traditional culinary products often face the risk of being perceived as antiquated in visually driven consumption environments (Ghorbani & Westermann, 2025; Shahwar et al., 2024). By adopting a minimalist typographic approach and a clean aesthetic, the "Tallu Nona Nona" identity establishes a premium positioning that bridges the gap between historical heritage and contemporary expectations. This strategy of using vibrant, culturally representative color tones to capture consumer attention and communicate brand values has been proven effective in enhancing the brand experience even for global premium tea brands in the Indonesian market (Erlyana & Hanifah, 2024). This finding corroborates that modern visual strategies are essential for introducing local culture to Generation Z (Erlyana & Yi, 2026; Huwaida et al., 2024), who prioritize visual storytelling and brand authenticity (Lauretta & Anggraeni, 2025; Ligaraba et al., 2024). Critically, the questionnaire results (91.9%–97.2% in the "strongly agree" category) should not only be interpreted as validation of aesthetic preference, but as evidence of successful semiotic alignment, where the intended meanings embedded in the design are accurately decoded by the audience. This suggests that effective visual identity operates as a shared code between designer and consumer, reducing misinterpretation and increasing communicative efficiency.

Strategically, the most critical implication of this visual identity construction is its direct resolution of the SME's operational and legal barriers. The transition to a legally recognized entity capable of fulfilling NIB (Business Identification Number) registration requirements supports the argument that business legality is a crucial form of legal protection and scalability for SMEs (Indrawati & Rachmawati, 2021). Ultimately, the resulting visual differentiation enables traditional SMEs to transcend the limitations of word-of-mouth marketing and compete effectively within digital ecosystems where visual consistency and innovative packaging design dictate market survival (Abolafia, 2025; Erlyana & Hanifah, 2024; Wibowo & Zainudin, 2024). By establishing a robust, culturally anchored system, "Tallu Nona Nona" is now structurally equipped to build sustainable brand equity and long-term consumer trust (Ghorbani & Westermann, 2025; Shukla et al., 2022). Beyond operational benefits, this finding implies that visual identity design also functions as a strategic translation tool that converts intangible cultural capital into tangible economic value, thereby positioning local SMEs not only as economic actors but also as cultural agents within the creative economy ecosystem.

Conclusion

This study successfully addresses its core research objectives by demonstrating the application of a structured, five-stage Design Thinking framework to construct a cohesive visual brand identity system for a 20-year-old traditional culinary SME in Makassar, Indonesia, culminating in the "Tallu Nona Nona" brand. Rather than representing a comprehensive transformation or preservation of Makassar's intangible cultural heritage as a whole, this research showcases a targeted design-led reinterpretation of selected local cultural assets. Specifically, the study illustrates how the geometric deconstruction of the traditional Burasa rhombus shape and a localized, food-ingredient-derived color palette (Pandan Green, Santan White, and Sirup Ambon Red) can be systematically translated into a modern, minimalist visual signifier. By translating these specific cultural touchstones into a cohesive and clean design language, this research establishes an operational model for traditional culinary SMEs to bridge historical cultural narratives with contemporary aesthetic expectations, solving the critical paradox of maintaining local cultural roots within a highly competitive, visually driven digital marketplace.

The study contributes to the literature on cultural branding by explicitly defining the distinction between conventional rebranding and what is conceptualized here as "construction-based branding" (or "zero-to-one branding"). While conventional rebranding focuses on modifying, updating, or optimizing an already established visual identity system to realign with shifting market conditions, construction-based branding addresses the unique epistemic and strategic challenge of constructing a coherent visual language from the ground up for long-standing, "non-brand" SMEs that have previously operated in visual obscurity. This design process represents a systematic semiotic translation of local heritage elements into modern brand assets, offering theoretical and empirical support for how design can act as a mediator to stabilize brand meaning by bridging the gap between the functional product (the signifier) and its deep cultural value (the signified). Moderating broader claims of absolute proof or historical preservation, user testing conducted among the 100 Generation Z respondents surveyed indicates that a clean, culturally grounded visual system significantly enhances brand recognition, perceived professionalism, and aesthetic appeal within this specific segment. These empirical findings underscore that for this target cohort, strategic design serves as a vital bridge to visual coherence and digital market readiness.

Furthermore, the study highlights the critical, yet often overlooked, relationship between visual communication design and business legality. The development of a formalized logo and brand identity served as a critical enabling factor that facilitated the SME's ability to satisfy the administrative criteria for obtaining a Business Identification Number (*Nomor Induk Berusaha* or NIB). Within the Indonesian regulatory context, establishing a distinct, documented brand name and visual representation streamlines the formal registration process, enabling informal micro-enterprises to transition to

officially recognized entities. While this study does not directly measure long-term business outcomes such as economic scaling, organizational resilience, or legal compliance over time, the formalization of "Tallu Nona Nona" represents an essential foundational step. By successfully establishing these initial visual and administrative structures, the SME is positioned to bypass structural legal barriers and access formal protections, commercial certifications, and digital ecommerce platforms, demonstrating that the designer acts as a strategic partner in fostering SME formalization.

Several key limitations of this study must be acknowledged to guide future inquiry and establish a realistic boundary for the findings. First, as a single-case study focused on one traditional culinary SME in Makassar, the specific design outcomes and operational processes may not be directly generalizable to all traditional food businesses. Second, the user testing and consumer preference evaluation was restricted to a sample of 100 Generation Z respondents, which does not capture the multi-generational demographic that consumes traditional culinary products. Finally, this study did not gather longitudinal evidence of actual sales, consumer engagement, or long-term brand equity post-implementation. Consequently, future research should prioritize empirical, longitudinal evaluations of the "Tallu Nona Nona" brand system to measure direct impacts on brand recognition, consumer perception, audience engagement, customer loyalty, and business performance. Only after establishing these foundational empirical baselines should subsequent studies explore more complex design extensions, such as integrating the visual identity into augmented reality (AR) packaging, interactive digital marketing, or immersive creative economy experiences.

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