

The Role of Visual Imagery in Building Brand Image and Consumer Purchase Intention in the Era of Social Media: A Literature Review

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Abstract

Visual-based social media platforms such as Instagram have become a primary channel for brand communication in the digital marketing era, particularly among Gen Z and Millennials, both highly visual-oriented consumers. This study explores how visual imagery shapes brand image and purchase intention on social media, with a particular focus on these two generational segments. Using a narrative literature review approach, the article synthesizes insights from recent studies examining the relationships between visual imagery elements, brand perception, and consumer decision-making processes. The findings highlight the strategic role of visual imagery in fostering positive brand associations, enhancing brand personality, and eliciting emotional responses that directly influence purchase intention. Gen Z and Millennials' preference for authentic, aesthetically pleasing, and emotionally resonant visual imagery emerges as a critical factor in the success of visual marketing strategies on social media. These insights contribute to the theoretical development of visual communication research and offer practical guidance for brands aiming to design more effective and relevant visual content on visual-first platforms such as Instagram.

Keywords: Visual Imagery, Brand Image, Purchase Intention, Social Media, Instagram, Generation Z, Millennials.

1. Introduction

The rapid development of social media over the past decade has drastically transformed the digital marketing landscape across the globe. Among the various platforms available, visually driven social media such as Instagram and TikTok have now emerged as primary channels for brand communication (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). These platforms enable brands to establish emotional connections with consumers through rich and immersive visual content. This phenomenon is further reinforced by the growing consumption of visual content across various industry sectors such as fashion, beauty, lifestyle, and food and beverages (Barbe & Guisard, 2024). As competition among brands on social media intensifies, innovation in visual marketing strategies becomes a necessity. Brands compete to present visual content that not only captures the audience's attention but also builds a strong brand image and encourages purchasing decisions (Waworuntu et al., 2022). Amidst the overwhelming flow of digital information, visual imagery becomes an element that can distinguish one brand from its competitors.

In the context of digital marketing, visual imagery refers to various visual stimuli such as photographs, videos, graphic design, and visual storytelling that directly influence



consumer perception and response (Tamara et al., 2021). The effectiveness of visual imagery is determined by several key elements, namely aesthetics, memorability, persuasive power, and the emotional content conveyed through visual media (Reunanen, 2024). Previous studies have shown that visual imagery plays an effective role in building brand associations and emotional connections between brands and consumers (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). Well-designed visual imagery not only increases brand recall and strengthens brand personality but also creates a positive perception that sticks to the brand (Odina & Koutelida, 2020). Moreover, the relationship between visual imagery and purchase intention, especially among young consumers, has been increasingly acknowledged in various studies (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021).

Visual imagery has also been proven to play a significant role in capturing consumer attention and influencing the decision-making process. Strong visual content can increase attention, create emotional engagement, and strengthen memory related to the brand (Rizomyliotis et al., 2021). The influence of visual imagery on the path to purchase decision-making is becoming more prominent in the era of social media, where consumers are exposed to hundreds or even thousands of visual stimuli daily (Ghaleb & Alawad, 2024).

The effectiveness of visual imagery in driving engagement and increasing conversions on social media has also been widely discussed in various studies. High-quality visual content is associated with higher numbers of likes, shares, comments, and conversion rates (Abonyi, 2024). Visual imagery has also been proven to trigger impulse buying and enhance brand loyalty, particularly among younger consumers (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021).

Instagram has now cemented its position as the leading visual platform (Rosdiana & Indrawati, 2024), supported by a dominant active user base consisting of Gen Z and Millennials (Barbe & Guisard, 2024). The platform offers a highly rich visual ecosystem that is particularly suitable for building brand image in consumer segments that are highly responsive to visual content. Against this background, this article aims to map the current literature on the influence of visual imagery on brand image and purchase intention on social media, with a specific focus on the Gen Z and Millennial segments. A deeper understanding of this relationship is expected to enrich the development of visual communication and digital marketing studies, while also offering practical insights for brand managers and content creators in designing more effective visual-based marketing strategies.

2. Methods

This study employs a narrative and structured literature review method, aiming to map the relationship between visual imagery, brand image, and purchase intention within the context of social media marketing. This approach was chosen because it allows the author to integrate various previous research findings systematically while identifying trends, contradictions, and research gaps in the existing literature.

The initial stage of the review process began with the search and selection of relevant literature. Literature searches were conducted through major academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, as well as nationally accredited journals. In addition, credible secondary sources such as reports from DataReportal, the Pew Research Center, and eMarketer were also utilized to obtain up-to-date information regarding the demographics of social media users, particularly on the Instagram platform.

The literature search was conducted using several key terms, including visual imagery, brand image, purchase intention, social media marketing, Instagram marketing, Gen Z, and Millennials. Inclusion criteria encompassed articles published in peer-reviewed journals,

academic books, conference proceedings, and research reports published between 2015 and 2025 to ensure the relevance and currency of the findings. Following the search process, an initial screening was conducted based on titles and abstracts, followed by a full-text review to ensure alignment with the focus of this study. Each article that met the criteria was examined for information related to the variables under study, such as the types of visual imagery, visual elements, dimensions of brand image, indicators of purchase intention, methodological approaches used, and relevant key findings. The extracted data were then synthesized using a thematic analysis approach, aimed at identifying common patterns of findings, contradictions among studies, and areas that require further exploration. The primary focus of the synthesis was on how visual imagery influences brand image and purchase intention, particularly among Gen Z and Millennial consumers as dominant users of visual-based social media platforms.

To ensure the quality of the reviewed studies, a qualitative evaluation was conducted, taking into consideration the research methodology, the relevance to visual social media contexts, and the suitability of the studied population. Studies focusing on Gen Z and Millennial populations were prioritized for more in-depth analysis. Based on this synthesis, the review also aims to provide recommendations for future research, especially in exploring the dynamic influence of visual imagery across various visual social media platforms and encouraging the development of more effective and evidence-based visual content strategies.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Visual Social Media: Context and Development

The advancement of digital technology has transformed the way consumers interact with brands. Social media has now become a primary channel for brands to build relationships with consumers through rich and interactive visual communication (Barbe & Guisard, 2024). Among the various platforms available, Instagram stands out as the most dominant visual platform, particularly among Generation Z and Millennials (Barbe & Guisard, 2024; Rizomyliotis et al., 2021). These two generations are known for being highly visually oriented, placing strong emphasis on aesthetics and visual experience in their decision-making processes (Tamara et al., 2021).

Instagram, through features such as photo feeds, reels, and stories, allows brands to communicate their brand narratives visually (Lee et al., 2025). Consistent visual imagery can strengthen brand identity, enhance user engagement, and build consumer loyalty (Odina & Koutelida, 2020). According to DataReportal (2024), more than 70% of Gen Z globally are active Instagram users, with Millennials being the second largest user group. Content consumption on this platform typically follows a fast-scrolling pattern, making visual appeal the primary factor in determining whether a piece of content attracts attention or is ignored (Rizomyliotis et al., 2021).

The emergence of other platforms such as TikTok reinforces the broader trend toward visual content consumption. However, Instagram remains the most strategic medium for building brand image in the context of lifestyle marketing, especially within industries such as fashion, beauty, and food and beverages (Barbe & Guisard, 2024).

3.2. Consumer Behavior on Visual Social Media

Consumer behavior on visual-based social media, particularly Instagram, is strongly influenced by the visual characteristics of the content they consume. Generation Z and Millennials, as the primary users of Instagram, are driven by diverse motivations in engaging with visual content—ranging from entertainment and product information seeking to self-

expression and lifestyle inspiration (Topalova & Todorova, 2021; Jacobsen & Barnes, 2020). Studies indicate that both generations place high value on content that is authentic and aesthetically pleasing (Fadiora, 2024). They assess the authenticity of a brand through the quality and consistency of its visual imagery (Ghaleb & Alawad, 2024). In addition, they are more likely to engage with brands that utilize compelling visual storytelling and appealing design (Waworuntu et al., 2022).

Consumer engagement is becoming increasingly complex. Beyond merely viewing or liking content, Gen Z and Millennials are actively commenting, sharing, and using brand-related hashtags (Yesiloglu & Gill, 2020). This demonstrates that visual engagement is a key indicator in fostering long-term relationships between brands and their audiences. One-way interaction, or parasocial interaction, between consumers and brands or influencers also plays a crucial role in shaping brand image perception and increasing purchase intention (Ashraf et al., 2023). Many young consumers report feeling emotionally connected to brands they follow visually on Instagram (Sokolova, 2023). In the decision-making process, visual stimuli displayed on Instagram have been shown to influence consumers' cognitive processes, from initial attention to eventual purchase intent (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). Visually appealing designs can trigger impulse buying, while a consistently built and positive brand image through visual imagery promotes long-term loyalty (Annous, 2023).

3.3. Visual Imagery on Social Media

Visual imagery serves as a core element in marketing communication strategies on social media, particularly on Instagram, which relies heavily on visual content as its primary appeal (Rizomyliotis et al., 2021). In this context, visual imagery encompasses visual representations such as photographs, videos, typography, layout design, and visual storytelling, all of which are used to convey brand messages and build emotional associations with consumers (Barbe & Guisard, 2024). Various elements of visual imagery play vital roles. Color, for instance, can evoke specific emotional atmospheres and strengthen brand personality (Abonyi, 2024). Typography and layout ensure visual clarity while reinforcing brand identity (Fadiora, 2024). The use of high-quality photos and videos is essential in capturing attention and fostering brand trust (Tamara et al., 2021). Moreover, consistent visual storytelling is viewed as an effective approach to creating deeper emotional bonds (Waworuntu et al., 2022).

The success of visual imagery on social media is not determined by visual beauty alone but also by its ability to build meaningful associations with the brand (Waworuntu et al., 2022). Visual imagery plays a role in reinforcing brand identity, shaping brand personality, and establishing strong emotional connections between brands and consumers (Fadiora, 2024). Among Gen Z and Millennials, the authenticity of visual imagery is a critical factor in shaping their perception of a brand (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). Overly polished or overtly promotional content is often less effective than content that appears authentic, personal, and relevant to their lifestyle (Barbe & Guisard, 2024). Consistent visual imagery also strengthens brand recall and loyalty (Rizomyliotis et al., 2021). Consumers who are regularly exposed to cohesive and visually appealing imagery are more likely to form strong emotional bonds with the brand, ultimately influencing their purchase intention (Tamara et al., 2021).

3.4. The Purpose of Visual Imagery on Social Media

Visual imagery on social media plays a strategic role that goes far beyond enhancing aesthetics. It is a key tool for building brand image, strengthening emotional relationships with consumers, and encouraging purchase intention (Tamara et al., 2021). On platforms like Instagram, visual imagery helps brands increase awareness, improve brand recall, and create lasting positive associations in the minds of consumers (Waworuntu et al., 2022).

First, visual imagery functions to attract attention in the midst of an overwhelmingly saturated information flow. Strong visual design helps brands stand out and immediately capture the attention of users who typically engage in fast scrolling behavior (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). Second, visual imagery shapes the desired perception of the brand. The use of visual elements such as color, typography, and consistent visual styles helps brands craft a memorable personality and enhance consumer trust, especially among younger generations (Barbe & Guisard, 2024; Rizomyliotis et al., 2021). Third, visual imagery plays a crucial role in generating purchase intention. Well-crafted visual stimulation can elicit emotional responses, reinforce attitudes toward the brand, and increase the desire to purchase the product (Annous, 2023). For Gen Z and Millennials, visual imagery that is authentic and inspiring has a significant impact on their decision-making path (Waworuntu et al., 2022).

The use of visual storytelling is becoming an increasingly relevant strategy. By presenting strong visual narratives, brands can convey their values, mission, and the lifestyle they wish to associate with their products (Abonyi, 2024). In this era of experience-driven marketing, Gen Z and Millennials expect brands to offer more than just products, they seek meaningful stories and connections that resonate with their personal identities.

3.5. Effective Elements of Visual Imagery on Social Media

Color is one of the most powerful visual elements in creating brand associations and eliciting emotional responses. Colors are capable of conveying perceptions aligned with brand personality, such as elegance, boldness, warmth, or energy (Abonyi, 2024). Generation Z and Millennials tend to prefer natural, minimalist, or bold color schemes that reflect their self-identity (Odina & Koutelida, 2020). Consistent use of color across all Instagram content strongly reinforces brand recall and consumer loyalty (Rizomyliotis et al., 2021).

Typography also plays a significant role in strengthening a brand's visual identity and ensuring that the message is readable and clearly conveyed to the audience (Abonyi, 2024). In the fast-paced context of social media, where users' attention spans are short, readability becomes critical. For Gen Z and Millennials, appealing typography tends to have minimalist, modern, and mobile-friendly characteristics, matching their behavior of consuming content almost entirely through mobile devices (Odina & Koutelida, 2020). The consistent use of typefaces that align with the brand's visual identity conveys professionalism and enhances credibility in the eyes of consumers. Cohesive typography across an Instagram feed creates not only a unified visual experience but also strengthens repeated brand presence in users' memory. This aligns with principles of visual hierarchy, where layout structure, font size, text spacing, and color choice directly influence audience focus and perceptions of brand quality (Rizomyliotis et al., 2021).

High-quality photography and video are essential components for capturing the attention of visually oriented Gen Z and Millennials. These users assess not only aesthetic quality but also the authenticity of content. They are more drawn to visuals that reflect aspirational lifestyles, real-life settings, and representations that align with their daily realities (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021; Fadiora, 2024). Naturally lit, minimally edited photos are often perceived as more credible and emotionally trustworthy. On Instagram, this approach leads to higher engagement. Short-form videos such as Instagram Reels have proven particularly effective for generating interaction, as they are fast-paced, lightweight, and easy to consume (Nakay, 2017). Reels allow brands to deliver dynamic and expressive storytelling. A study by Shin and Choi (2021) confirms that short-form video formats enhance engagement and purchase intention by combining entertainment and information in a single package. In many cases, video content also enables brands to convey values, introduce products, and

demonstrate production processes transparently, an important factor for Gen Z in establishing brand trust.

A clean, balanced, and intuitive layout is equally vital in enhancing users' visual comfort. Layouts with sufficient white space, a clear grid system, and structured visual elements help guide the viewer's attention to key areas within the content (Barbe & Guisard, 2024). Gen Z and Millennials greatly value understated aesthetics. They are more drawn to Instagram feeds that are well-organized, uncluttered, and present a visually rhythmic experience. As such, layout not only serves as a container for information but also as a determinant of perceived quality and brand credibility.

The use of visual storytelling has evolved into a highly influential communication technique in digital marketing. Rather than simply promoting products, brands now seek to construct narratives that incorporate emotion, identity, and values their audiences can relate to. Visual storytelling introduces a human dimension to content, making brands more relatable to consumers' real lives. Annous (2023) notes that coherent visual storytelling enhances perceptions of emotional closeness and fosters deeper loyalty. Barbe and Guisard (2024) further emphasize that Gen Z responds positively to visual narratives addressing social issues, sustainability, or other value-driven themes relevant to their lives.

Brand consistency across all visual elements is one of the foundational principles in building long-term consumer relationships. Consistent use of colors, typography, layout, and visual styles in photography and videography helps create a strong, memorable visual impression (Ghaleb & Alawad, 2024). With repeated visual exposure, consumers develop automatic associations that immediately recall the brand. This is crucial in digital environments flooded with visual stimuli daily. Consistency fosters a solid and recognizable identity. Abonyi (2024) and Odina and Koutelida (2020) also note that consumers exposed to stable brand imagery are more likely to exhibit brand loyalty due to increased emotional familiarity and comfort.

Equally important is the visual call-to-action (CTA), a strategic component for converting attention into action. Visually integrated CTAs that blend harmoniously with the content tend to be more effective than intrusive or disjointed ones. Gen Z and Millennials prefer CTAs that are subtle and aligned with the tone of the content (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). Interactive buttons, persuasive text overlays, and design elements such as "Tap to explore" or "See more" provide psychological stimuli that prompt user interaction. Meanwhile, urgency-based cues like "Limited edition," "Only today," or "Shop now" have been shown to drive impulse buying when integrated properly into the content's visual framework (Alcantara et al., 2024).

3.6. The Impact of Visual Imagery on Brand Image

Visual imagery plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer perceptions of brands on social media, particularly on platforms like Instagram that heavily rely on visual communication (Tamara et al., 2021). Brand image, which encompasses a brand's identity, personality, and perceived quality in the eyes of consumers which is strongly influenced by the visual elements encountered on social platforms (Rizomyliotis et al., 2021).

The use of visual storytelling on Instagram enables brands to create deeper meaning in the minds of their audiences. Lim and Childs (2016) demonstrated how this approach successfully builds strong emotional connections, particularly among Millennials who are highly responsive to authentic visual narratives. A similar finding is presented by Andhini and Andanawarih (2022), who show that visual storytelling significantly influences brand perception and purchase intention among Gen Z consumers in Indonesia.

For Generation Z, the authenticity of visual imagery is a key determinant in forming positive brand perceptions. They tend to reject overly polished content and instead value imagery that feels genuine and aligns with their personal values (Asli, 2024). This authenticity-driven approach fosters a deeper sense of trust and emotional attachment. In another context, lifestyle imagery on Instagram has been shown to generate aspirational brand perceptions and enhance customer loyalty (Hazari & Sethna, 2023). Personalized visual imagery aligned with Gen Z's lifestyle further strengthens perceptions of brand quality and contributes to higher brand loyalty (Elrizal & Astuti, 2024).

Interestingly, the impact of visual imagery not only directly shapes brand perception but also acts as a mediating variable in the relationship between influencer impact on Instagram and consumer purchase intention. This is evident in the findings of Tamara et al. (2021), who affirm that positive brand perception serves as a crucial bridge in the consumer's decision-making process. Visual imagery that incorporates emotionally framed corporate social responsibility (CSR) messages also exerts a strong influence, particularly among Gen Z. This cohort tends to place higher trust and emotional attachment toward brands perceived as socially responsible (Mei et al., 2025). Such approaches enrich the dimensions of brand image while simultaneously deepening the emotional bond between the brand and its consumers.

3.7. The Impact of Visual Imagery on Purchase Intention

Visual imagery not only shapes perception but also directly stimulates the intention to purchase. On Instagram, compelling visual content can generate attention, emotional engagement, and even drive purchasing behavior (Tamara et al., 2021; Rizomyliotis et al., 2021).

For Generation Z and Millennials, visually appealing and authentic content plays a major role in influencing purchase intention. Djafarova and Bowes (2021) demonstrated that the use of visual tools on Instagram can trigger impulse buying, especially through the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model, which illustrates how exposure to visual stimuli can rapidly lead consumers toward action. Specifically in the luxury fashion sector, aesthetically rich visual presentation has been shown to directly enhance purchase intention. Gen Z highly values visual content that is not only attractive but also reflects the brand's authenticity and values (Abonyi, 2024). The same holds true for lifestyle imagery, which can emotionally resonate with viewers and subsequently increase their desire to purchase (Hazari & Sethna, 2023). Visual creativity also plays a significant role. Guerrilla advertising content that employs unique, curiosity-provoking imagery has been found to elevate impulse buying tendencies among Gen Z (Alcantara et al., 2024). This indicates that visual surprise and a sense of urgency can be powerful drivers in consumer decision-making processes.

Among Millennials, visual aspects such as color, layout, and the quality of photos or videos in social media advertising significantly influence purchase intention (Agil et al., 2022). This highlights that while Gen Z and Millennials may differ in platform usage and digital habits, they share similar preferences for strong and authentic visual content.

Additionally, the more congruent the brand's imagery is with the consumer's self-image, the greater the purchase intention. Mamesah et al. (2023) illustrate how visual congruency, the alignment between brand imagery and consumer self-identity can significantly strengthen buying intentions, particularly within the Gen Z segment. Once again, authenticity emerges as a critical factor. For Gen Z, natural-feeling imagery is far more effective in prompting purchase intention than content that appears overly staged or artificial (Barbe & Guisard, 2024). Furthermore, brand image when reinforced through high-quality visual imagery which also plays a vital mediating role in increasing purchase intention, especially in highly visual product categories such as cosmetics (Tamara et al., 2021).

3.8. Visual Perception of Gen Z and Millennial Consumers

Generation Z and Millennials are consumer segments highly influenced by visual elements in shaping their brand perceptions on social media. Their perceptions are constructed through several key factors such as authenticity, aesthetics, emotional resonance, and alignment with personal values (Barbe & Guisard, 2024; Koohestani Asli, 2024). For Gen Z, authenticity is a crucial component. They tend to trust visual content that portrays real-life situations and brand narratives that feel relevant and non-commercial (Hazari & Sethna, 2023; Lim & Childs, 2016). In contrast, Millennials continue to appreciate aesthetic design, as long as it is consistent and communicates a clear message.

Visual imagery also plays an important role in eliciting emotional responses that influence brand attitudes. Feelings of awe, warmth, or joy triggered by visual content can strengthen positive attitudes toward a brand and influence purchase intention (Annous, 2023; Tamara et al., 2021). Therefore, a visual imagery strategy rooted in authentic storytelling and clear brand values is an effective approach to building trust, especially among Gen Z audiences.

Visual imagery that introduces surprise or evokes curiosity is also effective in capturing the attention of younger audiences, who tend to favor novelty (Alcantara et al., 2024). This principle of visual perception holds true across various product categories, including local and traditional businesses, as long as the imagery aligns with the values the brand seeks to communicate (Rayhan, 2024).

3.9. Instagram as the Dominant Platform

Instagram has emerged as the leading visual social media platform, especially among Gen Z and Millennials. Features such as photo feeds, Stories, Reels, and IGTV allow brands to build a strong visual narrative and consistent brand identity (Barbe & Guisard, 2024; Koohestani Asli, 2024). Gen Z users, on average, spend more time on Instagram than any other generation, making it the primary channel for visually reaching young consumers.

Purchase behavior triggered by visual exposure is also evident on Instagram. High-quality visual content presented in a concise and engaging manner, aligned with Gen Z's fast-scrolling habits is often a catalyst for purchase decisions (Jacobsen & Barnes, 2020). Studies show that Gen Z is more easily influenced by visual marketing on Instagram compared to Millennials (Sokolova, 2023), further reinforcing Instagram's position as an effective platform for visual marketing.

Instagram is also highly effective at building brand awareness through a combination of branded and user-generated content (Bäcklund & Martin, 2019). This approach enables brands to engage in more personal visual communication. Although other visual platforms such as TikTok and Snapchat are gaining popularity (Gentilviso & Aikat, 2019), Instagram remains a strategic reference point for constructing a coherent visual brand identity.

Interactive features like Reels and Stories have been proven to drive high engagement and reinforce brand recall among young users (Artemova, 2018). Instagram's strategic role in visual branding is increasingly vital in an era dominated by fast-paced, emotion-driven content consumption, particularly among Gen Z.

3.10. Visual Content Consumption & Interaction Patterns Among Gen Z and Millennials

The visual content consumption patterns of Gen Z and Millennials reveal generational preferences and behavioral nuances. Gen Z typically spends more time on visual platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, showing a tendency for fast scrolling and selecting content they perceive as authentic and relevant to their lifestyles (Barbe & Guisard, 2024). Features such

as Stories, Reels, live videos, polls, and quizzes serve as preferred interaction channels for Gen Z (Hazari & Sethna, 2023; Sokolova, 2023). They are also more active in sharing and engaging with visual content that reflects personal values through likes, comments, and peer recommendations. Millennials, on the other hand, tend to prefer structured feed-based content and place higher value on the visual consistency of a brand's presentation (Rizomyliotis et al., 2021).

In Indonesia, both generations exhibit a strong preference for informal, story-driven content (Darmawan et al., 2024). Habitual behaviors, such as browsing during leisure time, increase the likelihood of impulse buying as a result of repeated exposure to visual imagery (Jacobsen & Barnes, 2020). Another key factor is the influence of user-generated content and peer recommendations. Content created by other users is often perceived as more authentic than professionally produced advertisements, making it a critical asset in visual branding strategy (Scorita, 2025). Approximately 40% of Gen Z and Millennials actively seek brands that reflect their values through visuals not just aesthetic appearance (Canto-Sims, 2024).

3.11. Visual Imagery and Its Implications for Brand Image and Purchase Intention

In the landscape of visual social media, visual imagery serves as both a cognitive and emotional bridge linking consumers' brand perceptions with their purchasing tendencies (Rizomyliotis et al., 2021; Barbe & Guisard, 2024). Creative, contextually relevant visual content can foster positive brand perception and stimulate purchase intention, especially among Gen Z (Alcantara et al., 2024). Moreover, visual imagery conveyed through influencers carries substantial power in strengthening brand image and increasing purchase likelihood, as shown in the study by Tamara et al. (2021).

Congruence between brand imagery and consumer self-image also significantly enhances brand perception and purchase intention (Mamesah et al., 2023). The more relatable and authentic the imagery feels, the stronger the consumer's intention to make a purchase. In the fashion industry, visual appeal plays a critical role in constructing a strong brand image and driving purchase decisions. Gen Z is particularly responsive to imagery that allows them to express themselves visually (Barbe & Guisard, 2024).

This also holds true in the context of Instagram advertisements, where elements such as color, authenticity, and storytelling are central to forming a positive perception and stimulating purchase intent, especially among Millennials (Rizomyliotis et al., 2021). The credibility of visual imagery is another essential factor. In the context of Korean cosmetic products, image quality and authentic brand representation have been shown to reinforce brand image and elevate purchase intention among Gen Z consumers (Nugroho & Rahayu, 2022).

A study conducted in Manado by Waworuntu et al. (2022) confirms that visual imagery strategies on social media positively influence brand perception and drive purchase intention summarized effectively by the consumer behavior pattern: *"I see it, I want it, I buy it."* Repeated exposure to visual imagery also enhances brand attitude and purchase intention, particularly in the fashion sector, as demonstrated by the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model tested by Djafarova and Bowes (2021).

4. Conclusion

Based on the various findings discussed, it is evident that visual imagery plays a strategic role in building brand image and driving purchase intention in the era of social media, particularly among Generation Z and Millennials. Within a visual communication ecosystem that is increasingly rich and competitive such as Instagram, visual imagery becomes a primary tool for brands to build positive associations, strengthen brand personality, and create emotional experiences that influence purchasing decisions.

How consumers perceive visual imagery greatly determines their attitudes toward the brand and their intention to buy. Authenticity, aesthetics, storytelling, and visual consistency emerge as key factors that build brand trust and stimulate purchase intention. Visual imagery also enhances engagement, fosters deeper emotional connections, and increases brand loyalty. Gen Z and Millennials, as highly visually oriented audiences, deeply value brands that can offer emotional and personally relevant visual content. In their consumption experience, these generations actively engage with visual content through Stories, Reels, and user-generated content, opening up significant opportunities for brands to develop collaborative and community-driven visual imagery strategies.

Theoretically, these findings enrich the discourse in the fields of branding, visual communication, and digital marketing, especially in highlighting the mediating role of brand image between visual imagery and purchase intention. Practically, this study provides essential insights for brand managers and content creators in designing visual imagery strategies that are authentic, compelling, and responsive to the visual preferences of their target audiences.

Nevertheless, this study is not without limitations. Much of the literature is still focused primarily on Instagram, while other visual-based platforms like TikTok remain underexplored. Visual preferences influenced by cultural contexts also require deeper investigation, as findings from one region may not be generalizable on a global scale. Additionally, most of the reviewed studies are cross-sectional in nature, leaving the long-term effects of visual imagery exposure on purchase intention an open area for future research.

Future studies are encouraged to explore cross-platform visual preferences, consider cultural influences, and map the emotional journey of consumers from exposure to visual imagery to actual purchase intention. In an increasingly competitive and visual-centric digital marketing landscape, a deeper understanding of the role of visual imagery will serve as a strategic advantage for brands. Brands capable of designing visual imagery strategies that are authentic, emotionally resonant, and aligned with the visual preferences of Gen Z and Millennials will hold a strong competitive position. Continued collaboration between scholars and industry practitioners will be key to driving innovation in the development of adaptive visual marketing strategies that respond to the evolving behaviors of young consumers.

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