

THE ROLE OF VISUAL COMMUNICATION DESIGN AESTHETICS IN INCREASING CONSUMER PURCHASING POWER ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Eko Agung Sugiyarto¹
Dharma Indonesia University
ekoagung@undhi.ac.id

Maryami²
Sahid University
Maryami_999@gmail.com

Abstract

In the internet era dominated by social media, visual communication styles greatly influence customer perceptions and behavior. The purpose of this study is to further explore how visual aesthetics, particularly in terms of Instagram feed design, influence the purchasing power of young female customers in the city of Yogyakarta. Since women are often considered a potential target market with high consumption levels, this phenomenon is interesting to study. This study employs a descriptive qualitative research method by conducting in-depth interviews with millennials in Yogyakarta. The findings reveal that the design of online stores' Instagram feeds is significantly influenced by visual aesthetics. If the visual design presented is appealing, innovative, and aligns with the buyer's personal style, they are more likely to be interested and decide to purchase the product. These results indicate that online businesses should prioritize investing in high-quality visual design.

Keywords: *Visual Communication Design, Aesthetics, Social Media, Millennial Women*

Abstrak

Di era internet yang didominasi media sosial, gaya komunikasi visual sangat memengaruhi persepsi dan perilaku pelanggan. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mempelajari lebih lanjut tentang bagaimana estetika visual, khususnya dalam hal desain feed Instagram, memengaruhi daya beli pelanggan perempuan muda di Kota Yogyakarta. Karena kaum perempuan sering dianggap sebagai target pasar yang potensial dengan tingkat konsumsi yang tinggi, fenomena ini menarik untuk diteliti. Penelitian ini melakukan penelitian kualitatif deskriptif dengan melakukan wawancara mendalam dengan kelompok milenial di Yogyakarta. Studi menunjukkan bahwa desain feed Instagram toko online sangat dipengaruhi oleh estetika visual. Jika desain visual yang ditampilkan menarik, inovatif, dan sesuai dengan gaya pribadi pembeli, mereka cenderung lebih tertarik dan memutuskan untuk membeli barang tersebut. Hasil ini menunjukkan bahwa para pelaku bisnis online harus membeli desain visual yang bagus.

Kata kunci: *Desain Komunikasi Visual, Estetika, Media sosial, Perempuan milenial*

INTRODUCTION

Businesses must employ effective and adaptive marketing strategies to face increasingly fierce competition in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The ever-changing dynamics of consumer behavior, including tastes, needs, and psychological, social, and cultural influences, are key issues that must be addressed. Modern consumers do not only focus on product functionality; they also pay attention to the added value embedded in design and visual experiences. This situation drives manufacturers and marketers to continuously enhance product value to meet the demands of an increasingly complex and competitive market. Amidst rising levels of consumption in the age of computers and the internet, attractive visual communication design has become one of the key factors in purchasing decisions. With millennials being more sensitive to visual stimuli and aesthetics, product functionality tends to be prioritized without neglecting visual appearance. Visual aesthetics have become a strategic component in shaping consumer preferences and behavior because attractive designs can evoke emotions, build positive perceptions, and increase customer interest in a product or brand.

Philosophically, an important aspect of human life is aesthetics. In aesthetic philosophy, classical Greek society viewed art as a combination of the real world. They saw art not only as a symbol of beauty but also as a source of logical knowledge that had value for society. This view argues that aesthetics is an important part of the process of communication and meaning, and cannot be separated from function. This principle is still relevant in modern visual communication design, which combines function, beauty, and message simultaneously. For years, visual communication design has been an important component in effectively conveying messages to audiences. Design components such as color, typography, illustration, and layout make messages easier to understand and remember. “Visual communication design” is increasingly used to describe visual communication practices that are not limited to print or static media; it also includes digital, interactive, and information-based media. Visual communication is essentially the process of conveying messages through the sense of sight. Therefore, the primary medium in the interaction between messages and audiences is visual.

With the development of digital media, especially social media, the need for creative and communicative visual communication design has increased. Design is now more than just a display feature; it can be used strategically to build brand image, attract attention, and influence consumer decisions. Therefore, the term “visual communication design” is considered more representative than the term “graphic design” because it covers various media platforms for conveying information to people. The extent to which attractive visual communication design influences consumer purchasing power on social media, based on the above explanation, is the research question of this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Aesthetics in Visual Communication Design

In visual communication design, aesthetics are not solely related to visual beauty; they also encompass how visual elements are systematically arranged to effectively convey messages to the audience. Aesthetics are an important element in visual communication design, playing a significant role in building visual appeal while reinforcing the meaning of the message being conveyed. In visual communication design, aesthetics consist of various elements such as harmony, balance, proportion, composition, color, typography, and the suitability between form and function. A comfortable and meaningful visual experience is created by components that work together. The message to be conveyed becomes easier to understand and more persuasive when the visual elements are well designed.

Agustini (2019) states that visual communication design essentially aims to convey messages effectively through the processing of visual elements that are structured, communicative, and meaningful. In this case, aesthetics plays an important role in bridging the message with the audience, so that visual communication is not only informative but also capable of creating emotional bonds. Aesthetics also functions as an emotional factor in contemporary visual communication that influences the audience's perceptions, attitudes, and responses. Aesthetics cannot be separated from visual communication strategies that aim to influence audience behavior. This is because attractive visuals can leave a positive impression, increase interest, and encourage the audience to pay more attention to the message being conveyed.

Visual Communication Design as a Communication Medium

Visual communication design is a field of study that combines art, communication, and technology in the process of conveying messages through visual media. The purpose of visual communication design is to convey information in an attractive and effective manner to the audience by using visual elements such as images, colors, typography, and layout. With this method, messages are not only conveyed verbally but also reinforced with visual representations that can increase the audience's attention span.

Visual communication design trends continue to change in line with advances in technology and digital visual culture. The flat design approach, which emphasizes simplicity, readability, and visual clarity, is a growing trend, according to Anindita (2016). This method is considered adaptable to the demographics of modern audiences, especially the younger generation, who prefer simple, clean, and easy-to-understand visuals across various digital platforms. According to Istanto (2000), images and visual elements have great communicative power because they can be understood quickly and are cross-cultural. Visuals do not need to rely on written language to convey meaning. Therefore, visual communication design is not just about looking good; it can also be used strategically as a tool to identify people, provide information, and influence the behavior and attitudes of the audience.

With the development of digital technology, the role of visual communication design has expanded to various media platforms, especially digital media and social media. Visual communication design now must not only be visually appealing, but also able to convey messages easily, clearly, and quickly. Visual communication design is very important in advertising and marketing because it contributes to the formation of brand image and consumer perception. According to Walisyah (2019), visual communication is used in advertising to attract attention, create a special impression, and strengthen the identity of a brand or product. As a result, effective visual communication design must be able to integrate aesthetic elements with messages that are relevant and appropriate to the target audience's demographics so that the message can be optimally received.

Social Media as a Space for Visual Communication

Social media is a digital communication platform that allows people to interact unidirectionally, share information, and build virtual relationships without time or space constraints. Thus, social media has changed the way people communicate from one-way to two-way and participatory. Users can act as content producers and distributors and not just recipients of messages on various digital platforms. Social media is not only a tool for communication, but also a place to create opinions, identities, and lifestyles, according to Adzan Desar, Rina, and Synthia. (2023). Social media has become an arena for self-representation, where individuals and organizations build their image through shared content.

With the dominance of visuals in social media, appearance plays an important role in determining the appeal and success of a message.

On social media, visual content is crucial for attracting users' attention; platforms such as Instagram rely on well-designed images and videos to convey messages; well-designed content can instantly grab attention and leave a lasting emotional impression on the audience. Yosua and Nugrahaeni (2024) found that a creative approach to social media content, especially one that emphasizes attractive, consistent visuals that are consistent with the brand identity, has the ability to increase customer engagement. In online marketing, aesthetic visuals are very important for building trust, increasing interest, and increasing customer interest in certain goods or services.

The Influence of Visual Aesthetics on Consumer Interest and Purchasing Power

Studies show that visual aesthetics greatly influence customer interest and purchasing decisions. When well-designed, visual displays can create a positive first impression on customers, encouraging them to pay more attention to products. In digital marketing, visual impressions are often the first factor that determines whether customers continue to interact with or ignore a product. According to Adzan Desar, Rina, and Synthia. (2023), an attractive appearance on digital platforms can improve customer understanding of product quality and value. Positive perceptions make customers more trusting, which in turn influences their purchasing decisions. This is in line with Sari's (2022) findings, which state that good photo quality and visual design can increase the selling value of products, especially for MSMEs.

In addition, Cuhandi (2025) states that, in the digital age, visual communication design is very important for the success of marketing strategies. A pleasant visual experience can not only attract attention, but also foster a stronger emotional bond between customers and the items they purchase. A pleasant visual experience can make customers feel interested, comfortable, and satisfied, which in turn encourages them to make a purchase. Therefore, beautiful visual design can influence customer attitudes and behavior. This is evident in social media, which relies heavily on visuals, becoming a strategic factor in increasing customer interest and purchasing power. Therefore, businesses must consider the quality of visual communication design as an important part of their marketing strategy to increase the competitiveness of their products in the digital market.

RESEARCH METHOD

To answer the question of how aesthetic perspectives on art impact visual communication design, this study uses qualitative methods that emphasize depth of meaning and understanding of values. A qualitative approach was chosen because it is able to thoroughly explore individuals' perspectives, experiences, and interpretations of visual phenomena that influence shopping behavior. This method uses research subjects to understand social reality in context. In this study, a qualitative descriptive approach was used to systematically describe and explain phenomena based on empirical data in the field. This approach was used to describe the context of the problem and the actions taken by individuals in the decision-making process when shopping online. This study focused on how visual communication design influences the perceptions and behavior of students in the city of Yogyakarta. This study used a descriptive approach.

Students who actively shop online in Yogyakarta City are the main source of data for this study. Using purposive sampling techniques tailored to the research objectives, researchers can select informants who have direct experience with the research subject to obtain relevant and in-depth data. In addition to primary data, this study also uses secondary data. This secondary data includes literature, journals, and scientific articles on visual

communication design, aesthetics, and consumer behavior. In-depth interviews are used to collect information in a focused and comprehensive manner. These interviews are conducted using flexible questions, which allow researchers to adjust their questions based on the informants' responses. To supplement the research data, not only students were interviewed, but also people involved in online shopping practices. Furthermore, qualitative descriptive analysis is used to understand the results and draw conclusions in line with the research objectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Visual communication tools have been used by humans since prehistoric times, as evidenced by cave paintings that convey messages, symbols, and expressions of social life. With the emergence of symbol systems such as hieroglyphs, writing, inscriptions, and books, forms of visual communication have become increasingly diverse and dynamic as civilization has developed. This development shows that visual communication plays an important role in storing and conveying information and building the cultural identity of a community. The development of visual communication design in Indonesia can be traced back to the Dutch East Indies. The introduction of printing presses to Java from the Netherlands in 1659 was one of the early milestones. Initially, missionaries brought these printing presses to print holy books and Christian educational books. However, for several decades, the use of these machines was not optimal due to the limited number of people who were able to operate them. These printing presses not only printed educational and religious books, but also encouraged the publication of newspapers that focused on promoting education and religious principles. This later became the basis for the development of visual communication and print media in Indonesia.

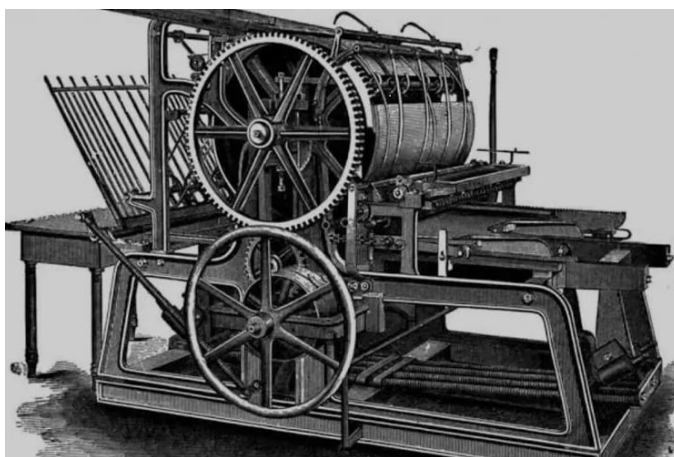


Figure 1. Dutch East Indies printing press, brand "Faber & Schleider".

Occurring in 1974, the event known as "Black December" became an important moment in the advancement of Indonesian art and design. It emerged as a form of criticism from young artists against the state's policy of awarding five painters whose works were considered repetitive and focused more on the market and decorative interests. This rejection reflected the younger generation's concern about the dominance of aesthetic norms, which were seen as limiting artistic freedom of expression. In response to this, the New Art Movement (GSRB) was founded in 1975. Rejecting the hierarchical separation between applied and pure art, GSRB brought a concept of renewal. According to GSRB, all types of art, including design, are considered equal mediums of expression and communication. In addition to advancing knowledge and understanding of fine arts in Indonesia, this movement enabled more experimental and contextual practices in visual communication design.

Entering the 1980s, Indonesia witnessed rapid growth in visual communication design, marked by the emergence of various graphic design studios. With the current popularity of design studios, professionalism in the field of design has increased. Designers must possess technical skills, innovation, and a strong conceptual understanding. This situation marks a shift in design from a purely artistic activity to a profession with standards and requirements set by the industry. Towards the end of the 1990s, artistic exploration continued to flourish, particularly through the use of unconventional media such as performance art and other experimental media. During this period, Yogyakarta developed into one of Indonesia's most important centers for the development of visual communication design. This development was also driven by technological advances and the role of the Yogyakarta–Bandung Dialogue Forum, which served as a place to exchange design ideas. Yogyakarta prioritized artists who focused on social and cultural realities, while Bandung artists typically presented works that celebrated modernity and technological advances. According to Agustini (2019), these different approaches resulted in a variety of concepts and styles in visual communication design.

The Role of Visual Communication Design in the 4.0 Era

Visual Communication Design is a field of study that examines communication ideas and innovative ways of using various media to convey messages and ideas. These components include typography, images, color composition, illustrations, and layout, all of which must be carefully designed so that the message can be effectively received by the intended audience. In today's era of computers and the internet, visual communication design must prioritize an attractive appearance as well as clarity of message and user experience. The function of visual communication design evolves and changes in line with technological developments in the 4.0 Era. With design rapidly evolving in both print and interactive, IT-based digital media, visual communication design must be flexible and responsive in order to keep up with audiences who are increasingly dependent on digital media and social media.

Conceptually, there are three main roles in visual communication design. First, as a tool to identify and help consumers understand who a product, organization, or individual is. This includes information about the origins, nature, and qualities that you want to showcase. Amid increasingly fierce competition, especially in the business and digital marketing industries, this identification function is crucial for building image and making a difference.

Second and third, visual communication design serves as a medium for information and education as well as a tool for persuasion. As a medium for information and education, visual design helps to understand the relationships between elements such as direction, position, scale, and information hierarchy so that they are easier to understand. As a tool for persuasion, visual design can influence the attitudes and behaviors of the audience through attractive, communicative, and relevant visual presentations. In the 4.0 era, these three functions work together to support communication and make messages more appealing across various online platforms.

Social Media

Social media is a digital platform that allows individuals and groups to interact, collaborate, and share content widely through the internet. The existence of social media has changed the way people communicate by providing an open, interactive, and participatory communication space. By using social media, people can act as recipients and disseminators of information. Used in various disciplines, such as communication, sociology, marketing, and information technology, the definition of social media varies greatly. Some experts emphasize social media as a means of collaboration and content creation, while others emphasize its role

in building relationships, identities, and personal bonds with users. The diversity of definitions shows that social media has complex and multifaceted characteristics.

Social media, also known as social networking, is a type of internet-based media that allows people to interact with each other virtually without the constraints of time or space. With features such as reposting, direct messaging, commenting, and content uploading, there is more intense two-way communication compared to conventional media. Social media not only functions as a communication tool, but also has significant social power that can influence public opinion. Social media is a strategic place to build public discourse because information that spreads quickly can generate support, conflict, and mass movements.

Social media is very important in shaping attitudes, opinions, and behaviors of society because of their power. Social media has become a useful tool for marketing and visual communication because they can influence customer perceptions through attractive and engaging visual content. Therefore, the proper use of social media is very important in conveying messages and building meaningful interactions with audiences.

Student Perceptions of Aesthetics in Visual Communication Design in Yogyakarta

Yogyakarta has a long history as a center of education and culture in Indonesia, making it widely known as the “City of Students.” It has been home to thousands of students from various regions in Indonesia since Gadjah Mada University (UGM) was founded in 1949. The city has many universities, both private and public, making it a meeting place for young people from diverse intellectual backgrounds. These backgrounds also contribute to the social, economic, and cultural dynamics of the community. Yogyakarta has many attractions for students, especially its strong academic environment, affordable cost of living, and rich culture. These conditions create a dynamic and creative urban ecosystem where the growth of arts and culture goes hand in hand with education. Students not only take part in academic activities, but they also participate in city life, such as how they consume and live their lives.

Yogyakarta is not only a city of education but also a center of art and creativity. The city has a strong artistic tradition, both contemporary and traditional. This is evident in various public places and tourist attractions, such as Malioboro, where shops sell fashion, handicrafts, and visual artworks, such as wayang, paintings, posters, and various other creative products. Therefore, Yogyakarta is famous for its diverse and rich visual expressions. The visual communication design process in Yogyakarta is also influenced by these developments in art and culture. To date, visual communication design is still used as a promotional tool, especially for online businesses. Companies use visual power to attract consumers through attractive and appealing displays. In situations like this, visual communication design serves to convey product information and create images and emotional appeal.

Visual communication design must consider many important factors in order to attract customers. It should not only display the product's form, price, or discount, but also be enjoyable and relevant to customers, especially on social media. An attractive design is not enough to simply display the product's form, price, or discount. This is in line with AG's statement in an interview about the impact of attractive visual communication design on online shopping decisions. AG said that attractive video designs or Instagram feed displays can trigger the desire to buy goods. According to him, the level of customer interest and enthusiasm for online shopping is greatly influenced by the visual differences between ordinary and aesthetically pleasing online stores.

In addition to answering questions, informants were also given several choices of images that they considered most appealing for deciding on online shopping.

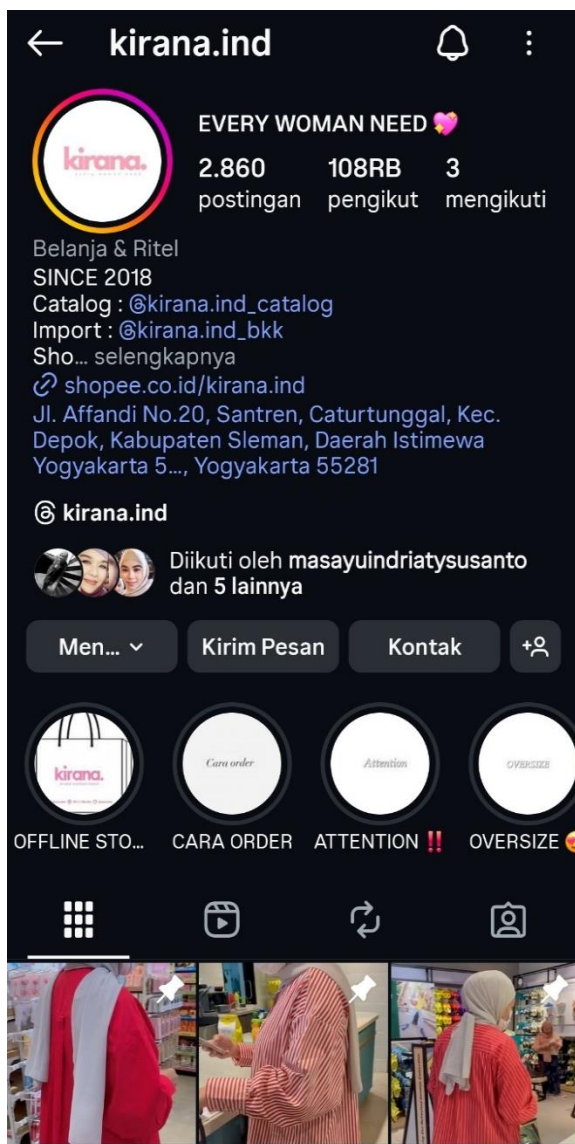


Figure 2. Online Store Account Display

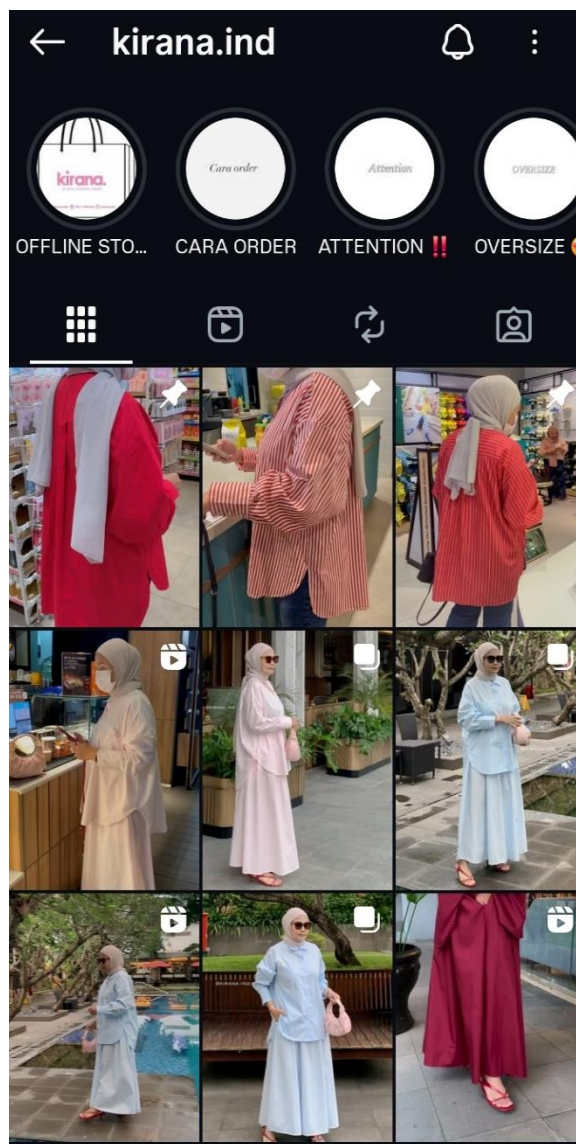


Figure 3. Cheap Clothing Display in Online Stores

According to DA, visual communication design plays an important role as a marketing strategy in terms of online and offline shopping. DA added that the aesthetic level of visual appearance often influences shopping decisions because it gives an artistic impression and creates a unique sense of satisfaction. According to him, because they are considered more “hits” and in line with visual trends developing on social media, products or online stores with attractive designs tend to be more popular in the modern era. According to the DA perspective, visual aesthetics influence customer feelings in addition to attracting attention. An attractive visual appearance can increase a person's interest in a product and encourage them to make a purchase. This shows that visual communication design has a strategic role in providing value to customers.

In line with this opinion, informant FA said that people not only consider the function of a product but also its appearance when shopping online. FA believes that aesthetic appearance is very important, especially in the era of social media, which places a high priority on visual beauty. Aesthetic appearance is also considered important for documentation and uploading needs in everyday life, such as college. To attract more customers, FA says online stores must make their appearance as aesthetically pleasing as

possible. This statement shows that visual communication design can influence people's perceptions and make online stores more popular. Therefore, visual aesthetics play an important role in generating interest, increasing interaction, and encouraging consumers to make purchasing decisions on social media.

In addition to asking interview questions, researchers also provided informants with several image options representing various styles of visual communication design. These images were selected to observe the informants' visual responses and identify which designs were considered most appealing in the context of online shopping decisions. Through this method, researchers were able to understand the informants' visual preferences more concretely, rather than relying solely on verbal statements. The provision of image options aimed to explore the informants' aesthetic perceptions of visual elements such as composition, color, typography, and the overall impression of the design. Informants were asked to choose the most attractive image and explain the reasons behind their choice. The results of this process provided an overview of how aesthetic visual communication design can influence consumer attraction, purchase interest, and tendencies in making choices when shopping online.

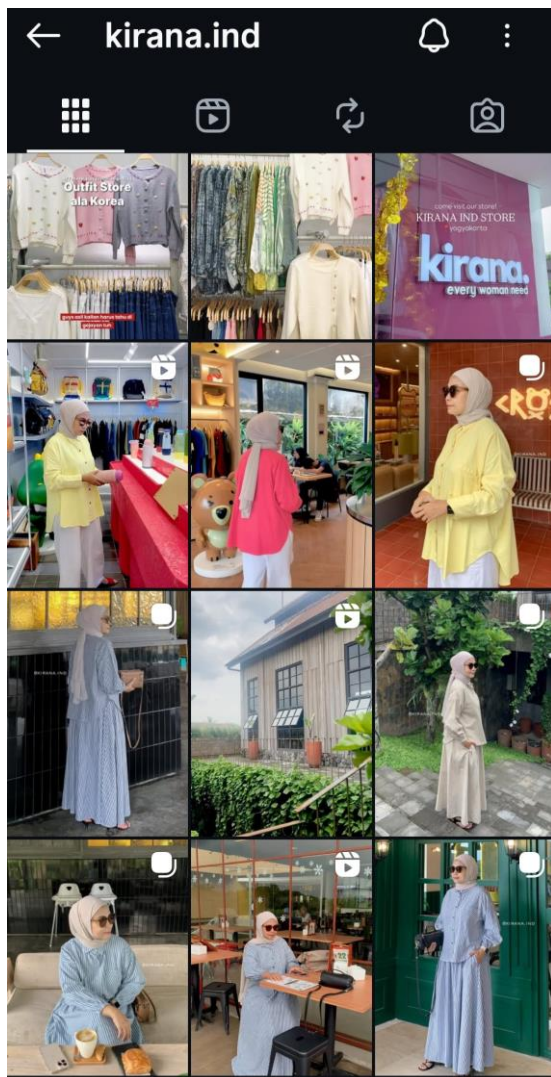


Figure 4. Visualization of Cheap Clothing Products in Online Stores

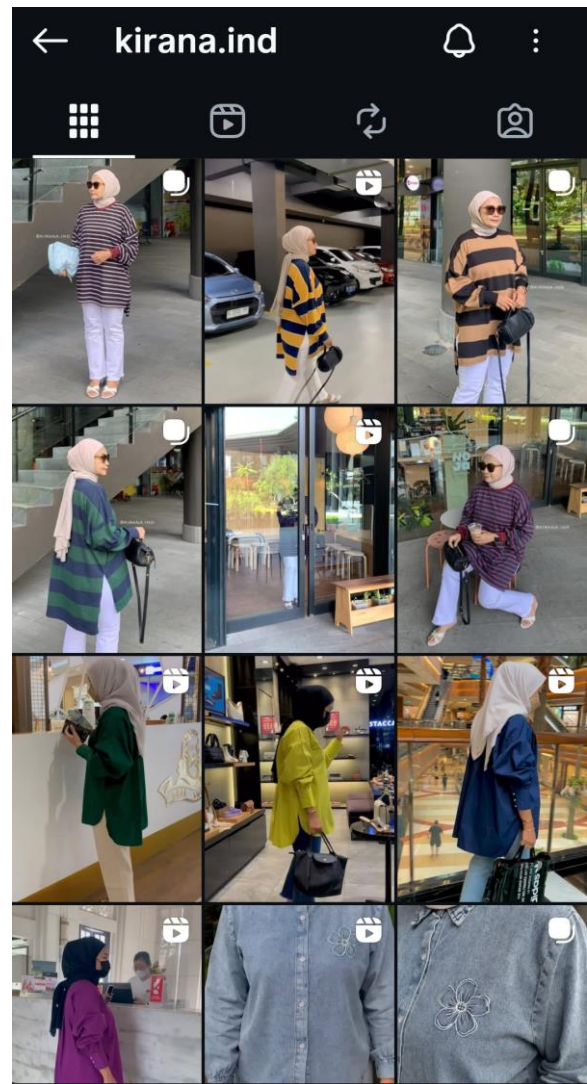


Figure 5. Presentation of Low-Priced Clothing through Online Shopping Sites

In explaining his decision to purchase an item, informant AG said that he preferred the Mayoutfit online store because their Instagram feed was considered attractive, neat, and appealing. Although the prices of products at Mayoutfit were comparable to other online stores such as Oclo, AG was more attracted to Mayoutfit because of its visual nuances, especially the pastel colors, which made a stronger and more emotional impression. This statement shows that visual design can be an important element in competition between online stores. AG's opinion is reinforced by the statement of informant AR, who said that Oclo's visual design does not seem to follow current visual trends. AR believes that online stores must continue to develop their visual communication designs to remain relevant and attract customers' attention. A comparison between the two online stores shows that customers tend to prefer brands that are able to display fresh, contemporary visual designs that suit customer tastes.

Based on the informants' statements, it can be concluded that attractive visuals on Instagram have a significant impact on customers' interest and tendency to shop online. Attractive visuals not only attract initial attention, but also influence their perception of product quality and appeal, even if the product prices are relatively the same. In addition to serving as a promotional tool, aesthetic visual communication design builds consumer experiences, shapes positive perceptions, and influences attitudes and purchasing behavior on social media. Thus, the visual and emotional satisfaction resulting from this satisfaction drives higher engagement and encourages better purchasing decisions.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this study shows that aesthetically pleasing visual communication designs have a significant impact on increasing the purchasing power of online consumers, especially among students. By using attractive displays, you can grab customers' attention, make them interested in buying products, and make them feel emotionally attached, which in turn can increase customer loyalty. Positive perceptions of a product or brand are influenced by innovative and consistent visual designs. Online businesses that invest in innovative and attractive visual communication design tend to be more successful in attracting customers and increasing their sales. Online stores with strong visual designs have stronger brand reputations and are more memorable to customers, unlike online stores that pay less attention to the quality of their Instagram feeds and visual marketing strategies. This shows that visual communication is an important factor in digital market competition.

In an increasingly competitive digital age, visual communication design remains relevant and plays a strategic role in various aspects of life, especially in social media-based business activities. Therefore, online businesses must recognize the importance of implementing sustainable visual design strategies. By using the right visual communication design, companies can become more competitive and survive longer.

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