

THE ROLE OF VISUAL BRANDING IN SHAPING CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT IN SOCIAL MEDIA: A CASE STUDY OF PORTOPHOTO

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ABSTRACT

The digital era has made visual branding a crucial element in building customer engagement on social media, especially for photography brands whose main product is visual content. This study aims to analyze the influence of visual branding on customer engagement on Portophoto's social media, identify the most influential visual elements, and explain the mechanism of forming consumer engagement patterns. The study used a quantitative approach with a survey research design on 257 active Instagram Portophoto followers who were used as respondents through a total sampling technique. The characteristics of the respondents were dominated by the age group of 18-25 years old at 60.7% with a S1 education level of 49.8%. Data collection was conducted using a structured questionnaire adapted from the Visual Brand Identity and Customer Engagement Behavior scale with high reliability ($\alpha = 0.891$ and 0.923). Data analysis used simple linear regression with SPSS software version 26. The results showed that visual branding had a positive and significant effect on customer engagement with a determination coefficient value of $R^2 = 0.530$ and a significance value of $p = 0.000$. The aesthetic dimension of content obtained the highest perception (mean = 4.35), while emotional engagement became the dominant dimension in consumer engagement patterns (mean = 4.18). These findings confirm that visual branding consistency is able to explain 53.0% of customer engagement variations, providing strategic implications for digital marketers to optimize aesthetic quality and visual composition to improve customer interaction on social media platforms.

Key words: Visual Branding; Customer Engagement; Social Media; Commercial Photography; Posted on Instagram

INTRODUCTION

The digital era has shifted marketing communication toward social media as the main platform for brand–consumer relationships, where visual branding plays a central role in conveying identity and values. Visual content generates 650% higher engagement than text (Pandey & Pandey, 2018), while visual consistency can increase brand recall by up to 80% and influence purchasing decisions (Isibor et al., 2021). Customer engagement comprises cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions (Isibor et al., 2021). Authentic visual storytelling can raise user-generated content by 28% (Naem & Okafor, 2019), and brand–consumer interaction is shaped by visual quality and posting frequency (Voorveld et al., 2018). Moreover, social media algorithms prioritize highly engaging content (Appel et al., 2020).

This study analyzes how Portophoto's visual branding on social media shapes customer engagement. The research examines: (1) the implementation of visual branding, (2) the most influential visual elements on engagement, and (3) the mechanism through which visual branding forms engagement patterns. Theoretically, the study contributes to visual communication and digital marketing literature; practically, it provides guidance for creative businesses and strategic insights for Portophoto in strengthening customer relationships.

METHOD

This study employs a quantitative survey design to examine the role of visual branding in shaping customer engagement on Portophoto's social media. A quantitative approach enables systematic measurement of variables and statistical analysis of their relationships. The population consists of 257 active followers of the Portophoto Instagram account during the data collection period. Due to the relatively small population, total sampling (census) was applied, involving all eligible followers. Respondents were required to have followed the account for at least three months, be 18 years or older, and have interacted with the content (likes, comments, or shares).

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire adapted from the Visual Brand Identity scale by Kumar and Ayodeji (2021) (15 items) and the Customer Engagement Behavior scale by (Isibor et al., 2021) (18 items), covering cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. A five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) was used. Validity was tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation ($r > 0.30$), and reliability using Cronbach's Alpha ($\alpha > 0.70$). The questionnaire was distributed via Google Forms through Instagram direct messages and posts over two weeks. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and simple linear regression with SPSS version 26.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the demographic profile of respondents, including gender, age, education, occupation, and length of time following the Portophoto Instagram account. These data help to understand the characteristics of Portophoto's target audience.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N=257)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Man	143	55,6
	Woman	114	44,4
Age	18-25 years old	156	60,7
	26-35 years old	78	30,4
	36-45 years old	18	7,0
	>45 years old	5	1,9
Education	High School/Equivalent	62	24,1
	Diploma	45	17,5
	S1	128	49,8
	S2/S3	22	8,6
Work	Student/Student	98	38,1
	Private Employees	89	34,6
	Entrepreneurial	41	16,0
	Professional	21	8,2
	Other	8	3,1
Long Follow-Up	3-6 months	87	33,9
	7-12 months	102	39,7
	>12 months	68	26,4

Source: Primary data processed, 2025

Based on Table 1, most respondents are male (55.6%), while females account for 44.4%, indicating stronger male interest in Portophoto's content. The majority are aged 18–25 years (60.7%), followed by 26–35 years (30.4%), showing that the primary audience consists of Gen Z and millennials with high social media usage. Most respondents hold a bachelor's degree (49.8%), suggesting good visual literacy. In terms of occupation, students (38.1%) and private employees (34.6%) dominate, with 39.7% having followed the account for 7–12 months. Validity and reliability tests were conducted to ensure that the instruments accurately and consistently measure the visual branding and customer engagement variables.

Table 2. Instrument Validity and Reliability Test Results

Variable	Number of Items	Value Range r	Cronbach's Alpha	Information
Visual Branding	15	0,342 - 0,687	0,891	Valid & Reliable
Customer Engagement	18	0,318 - 0,721	0,923	Valid & Reliable

Source: Primary data processed, 2025

All items met the validity requirement ($r > 0.30$). Visual Branding correlations ranged from 0.342–0.687 and Customer Engagement from 0.318–0.721. Cronbach's Alpha values were 0.891 and 0.923, indicating excellent reliability. Thus, the instrument adapted from (Isibor et al., 2021) is reliable in this context. The descriptive analysis measures respondents' perceptions of Portophoto's visual elements on Instagram, including color, typography, composition, aesthetics, and overall visual identity.

Table 3. Description of Visual Branding Variable Statistics

Dimension	Mean	Std. Deviation	Category
Color Consistency	4,12	0,58	Tall
Typography	3,87	0,64	Tall
Visual Composition	4,28	0,52	Tall
Content Aesthetics	4,35	0,49	Tall
Visual Identity	3,94	0,61	Tall
Total Visual Branding	4,11	0,47	Tall

Source: Primary data processed, 2025

Categorization: Low (1.00-2.33), Medium (2.34-3.67), High (3.68-5.00)

Based on Table 3, Portophoto’s visual branding achieved a high mean score of 4.11 (SD = 0.47). Content aesthetics received the highest rating (M = 4.35), followed by visual composition (M = 4.28), indicating strong visual quality and arrangement. Color consistency also scored high (M = 4.12), reflecting a cohesive visual identity. Typography obtained the lowest mean (M = 3.87), though still in the high category, suggesting room for improvement in text overlay and font selection.

Descriptive analysis of customer engagement assesses three dimensions: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement.

Table 4. Description of Customer Engagement Variable Statistics

Dimension	Mean	Std. Deviation	Category
<i>Cognitive Engagement</i>	4,02	0,56	Tall
<i>Emotional Engagement</i>	4,18	0,53	Tall
<i>Behavioral Engagement</i>	3,76	0,68	Tall
Total Customer Engagement	3,99	0,52	Tall

Source: Primary data processed, 2025

As shown in Table 4, overall customer engagement is in the high category (M = 3.99; SD = 0.52). Emotional engagement records the highest mean (4.18), indicating strong positive emotional responses to Portophoto’s content. Cognitive engagement follows (4.02), reflecting active attention and message processing. Behavioral engagement scores the lowest (3.76), suggesting that while emotional and cognitive involvement are high, interactive actions such as commenting, sharing, or saving content can still be improved.

Classical assumption tests were conducted before regression analysis to ensure the model met the BLUE criteria, including normality, linearity, and heteroscedasticity tests.

Table 5. Classical Assumption Test Results

Test Type	Method	Value	Criterion	Conclusion
Normality	Kolmogorov-Smirnov	0,068	$p > 0.05$	Normally distributed data
Linearity	<i>Test for Linearity</i>	0,000	$p < 0.05$	Significant linear relationships
Heteroscedasticity	<i>Glejser Test</i>	0,421	$p > 0.05$	Heteroscedasticity does not occur

Source: Primary data processed, 2025

The Kolmogorov–Smirnov test shows a significance value of 0.068 ($p > 0.05$), indicating normally distributed residuals. The linearity test yields 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), confirming a significant linear relationship between visual branding and customer engagement. The Glejser test produces 0.421 ($p > 0.05$), indicating no heteroscedasticity. Thus, the regression model is appropriate for further analysis.

A simple linear regression analysis was used to test the influence of *visual branding* (X) on *customer engagement* (Y) on Portophoto's social media.

Table 6. Results of Simple Linear Regression Analysis

Type	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-count	Sig.	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²
Constant	0,847	0,182	4,654	0,000	0,728	0,530	0,528
Visual Branding	0,765	0,044	17,386	0,000			

Source: Primary data processed, 2025

The regression equation ($Y = 0.847 + 0.765X$) indicates that visual branding has a positive effect on customer engagement. The regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.765$) shows that every one-unit increase in visual branding leads to a 0.765 increase in customer engagement. The constant value (0.847) represents the baseline level of customer engagement when visual branding is zero.



Figure 1. Scatter Plot Visual Relationship Branding and Customer Engagement

The scatter plot indicates a positive linear relationship between visual branding and customer engagement, with data points distributed consistently around the regression line. Regression results show a strong positive correlation (R = 0.728) and a determination coefficient (R² = 0.530), meaning visual branding explains 53.0% of the variance in customer engagement, while 47.0% is influenced by other factors such as content quality and posting frequency. The Adjusted R² (0.528) confirms model consistency. The t-value of 17.386 ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$) indicates a

significant effect, and the regression coefficient (0.765) shows that each one-unit increase in visual branding increases customer engagement by 0.765 units.

These findings align with (Pandey & Pandey, 2018), which state that well-designed visual content significantly increases engagement, and support the role of visual consistency in strengthening brand identity (Moran et al., 2020) through cognitive fluency. Consistent visuals enhance brand recall and engagement (Lim & Rasul, 2022), particularly in algorithm-driven platforms (Lou & Xie, 2021; Appel et al., 2020), making visual branding a strategic asset for photography-based brands (Cuevas-Molano et al., 2021).

Descriptively, content aesthetics received the highest evaluation (4.35), followed by visual composition (4.28), while typography scored relatively lower (3.87). This suggests that aesthetic quality is the main driver of engagement, differing from (Naem & Okafor, 2019), who emphasize visual storytelling. For visually literate audiences (Li & Xie, 2020), composition enhances cognitive engagement (Lim & Rasul, 2022), though typography requires optimization (Voorveld et al., 2018; Valenzuela-Gálvez et al., 2022).

Customer engagement is overall high (3.99), with emotional engagement highest (4.18), followed by cognitive (4.02) and behavioral (3.76). This reflects strong emotional bonds consistent with engagement theory (Isibor et al., 2021). High-quality visuals stimulate deeper cognitive processing (Pandey & Pandey, 2018), yet behavioral actions can be improved through integrated call-to-action strategies (Pandey & Pandey, 2018; Warbung et al., 2023; Wulandari et al., 2025).

Demographically, most followers are aged 18–25 and highly educated, reflecting digital natives with strong visual expectations (Lim & Rasul, 2022). Long-term followers show stable engagement (Naem & Okafor, 2019), highlighting the importance of retention through consistent branding. Understanding audience characteristics is essential for targeted strategies (Voorveld et al., 2018; Pandey & Pandey, 2018).

Theoretically, this study extends visual communication and digital marketing literature by confirming that visual branding significantly shapes engagement, supporting cognitive fluency and brand identity perspectives (Lim & Rasul, 2022; Isibor et al., 2021). Practically, brands should maintain visual consistency, strengthen typography, and integrate engagement-driven strategies in algorithm-based environments (Appel et al., 2020).

However, the study is limited to Instagram, uses self-report data, and examines only visual branding, while other variables may influence engagement (Voorveld et al., 2018; Dwivedi et al., 2023). Future research should consider longitudinal designs, cross-platform comparisons, moderator variables, and mixed-method approaches for a more comprehensive understanding (Michael & Fusté-Forné, 2022; Naem & Okafor, 2019).

CONCLUSION

This study successfully proves that visual branding has a positive and significant influence on customer engagement on Portophoto social media, with a contribution of 53.0% to the variation in customer engagement levels. The aesthetic dimension of content and visual composition proved to be the visual elements of branding that were most appreciated by followers, while emotional engagement emerged as the dominant dimension in consumer engagement patterns, indicating that high-quality visual content is capable of evoking strong emotional responses. The mechanism of visual branding influence on customer engagement takes place through a process of cognitive fluency, where the consistency of visual identity facilitates easy brand recognition and reduces the cognitive burden in processing information, thus encouraging more intense engagement. The demographic characteristics of followers, which are dominated by millennials and Gen Z with high visual literacy, show the importance of maintaining consistent visual quality standards to meet the expectations of digital native audiences. These findings provide strategic implications for digital marketers to not only focus on visual aesthetic aspects, but also integrate interactive elements that can convert emotional and cognitive engagement into measurable behavioral actions. Further research is suggested to explore the comparative influence of visual branding across various social media platforms and integrate moderator variables such as brand trust and perceived authenticity for a more comprehensive understanding of engagement dynamics in the digital ecosystem.

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