

# Virtual Art Applications in Promoting Local Entrepreneurial Products on Shopee Malaysia

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## ABSTRACT

Virtual art has emerged as a transformative force in the evolving landscape of digital retail, particularly within e-commerce platforms such as Shopee Malaysia. This review critically examines the role of virtual art encompassing digital illustrations, augmented visuals, motion graphics, and immersive design elements in promoting products by local entrepreneurs. It highlights how these creative tools enhance brand storytelling, strengthen consumer trust, and foster emotional engagement, especially for micro and

small enterprises (MSEs) operating with limited marketing resources. Drawing upon interdisciplinary literature, the paper explores the ways in which Malaysian sellers utilize virtual aesthetics to embed cultural identity and product value in highly competitive digital marketplaces. In addition, it addresses the challenges faced by entrepreneurs, including limited design literacy, financial constraints, and low awareness of the strategic potential of visual content. The review concludes by identifying future opportunities for capacity building, platform support, and collaborative innovation to democratize the use of virtual art in local entrepreneurship.

**Keywords:** *Cultural branding, Digital entrepreneurship, E-commerce, Shopee Malaysia, Virtual art*

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the retail industry has undergone a profound transformation driven by digital technologies and shifting consumer behaviours. The emergence of e-commerce platforms has enabled a borderless marketplace where businesses, including micro and small enterprises (MSEs), can engage with consumers beyond physical limitations. In this evolving digital economy, the way products are presented visually has become an especially critical factor in influencing consumer perceptions, trust, and purchase intentions. As consumers are often unable to physically interact with the product, visual representation serves as a substitute for tactile experience and becomes central to the decision-making process (Csaszar et al. 2024). According to Rachman et al. (2024), compelling digital storytelling significantly improves engagement in online branding environments.

The rise of virtual art within the digital commerce landscape has brought about a new dimension to online retailing. Virtual art, in this context, refers to digitally created or enhanced visual elements such as illustrations, 3D renderings, augmented reality (AR), and animated graphics that enhance product storytelling and brand identity. These digital aesthetics are no longer limited to major retailers or luxury brands; they are increasingly being utilized by small scale entrepreneurs seeking to establish a distinct visual identity in crowded marketplaces (Poushneh & Vasquez Partaga, 2017). By integrating virtual art into their digital storefronts, sellers can craft immersive shopping experiences that differentiate their offerings and foster deeper emotional engagement with consumers (Javornik, 2016).

In Malaysia, Shopee has emerged as one of the dominant e-commerce platforms, especially for local entrepreneurs and small business owners. The platform's user-friendly interface and support for seller driven branding have created new opportunities for local products to reach wider audiences. However, in the absence of a physical retail environment, the visual strategy employed in a seller's Shopee store plays a pivotal role in attracting and retaining consumers. Many successful sellers have adopted creative and artistic approaches to product presentation, such as using local motifs, vibrant colours, and motion design to communicate not only the product's features but also its cultural value and uniqueness (Chen, 2024).

This review explores how virtual art is strategically used by local entrepreneurs in Malaysia to promote their products on Shopee. It seeks to analyse how these visual strategies contribute to branding, consumer engagement, and sales performance, particularly for businesses that operate with limited resources. This inquiry is relevant not only in understanding contemporary retail aesthetics but also in highlighting how digital creativity can be a tool of empowerment for local businesses. While this study does not employ primary empirical methods, it draws on secondary literature and illustrative cases to identify key patterns and propose directions for future research and practice in the integration of virtual art in retailing.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Defining Virtual Art In Retailing Context

Virtual art in retailing refers to the strategic application of digitally crafted visual elements that are aesthetically engaging and designed to simulate or enhance the sensory experience of shopping. These elements may include 2D and 3D product visuals, interactive animations, digital illustrations, and augmented or virtual displays. The goal is not merely to display a product but to elevate the visual narrative that surrounds it, making the shopping experience more immersive, interactive, and emotionally engaging (Wang, 2024). In contrast to traditional product photography, which serves a purely functional role, virtual art in retail seeks to capture the imagination of the viewer by adding artistic expression and emotional cues.

The implementation of virtual art in retail environments is driven by its dual function as both a design asset and a marketing strategy. Visually compelling digital content enhances a brand's ability to communicate intangible product attributes such as texture, quality, emotion, heritage, and lifestyle fit. This is particularly important in online retailing where the absence of physical interaction can be a barrier to purchase (Poushneh & Vasquez-Parraga, 2017). Through virtual art, sellers can create the illusion of depth, tactility, and movement, offering consumers a closer approximation of the in-store experience from the comfort of their devices.

Moreover, virtual art facilitates storytelling in ways that static visuals cannot. For example, a digitally animated sequence may show how a handmade soap is produced using local herbs, or how a batik fabric is dyed using traditional techniques. These stories can foster a deeper sense of connection between the consumer and the brand, particularly when such stories are rooted in cultural or artisanal values. This connection becomes a powerful differentiator for small and local entrepreneurs who are competing with mass produced goods. Consumers, especially in global and saturated markets, often gravitate toward products with "authenticity" a quality that virtual art can help communicate effectively through visual narratives (Choi & Kim, 2016).

In the Malaysian context, virtual art also plays a critical role in reinforcing cultural identity within the digital marketplace. Entrepreneurs often embed local design elements such as batik motifs, or traditional kampung scenes into their product packaging and promotional content. These culturally resonant visuals are then digitally recreated and displayed on platforms like Shopee, giving local businesses a competitive advantage in promoting their products as unique and heritage rich. This not only attracts domestic buyers but also appeals to international consumers seeking culturally distinctive items (Kishor, 2024). Thus, virtual art becomes a medium through which tradition and modern commerce intersect.

In addition to enhancing cultural storytelling, virtual art also aligns with the aesthetic expectations of digital native consumers, particularly Gen Z and Millennials. These consumers tend to value visual fluency, interactivity, and creativity in online environments. A storefront that incorporates digital artwork, animation, or AR elements may signal professionalism, innovation, and brand consciousness attributes that younger buyers consider when evaluating credibility and value (Zaibon et. al. 2024). Hence, the presence of virtual art is not only decorative but performs a critical branding function that influences how consumers evaluate the trustworthiness and desirability of a product. Gen Z consumers, for example, prefer sleek visuals and AR tools when shopping online (Schapsis, 2025).

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that virtual art in retail is not a monolithic concept. It encompasses a spectrum of technologies and creative practices, from simple graphic design to fully immersive VR showrooms. The level of complexity and interactivity depends largely on the seller's

digital capabilities and resources. While some entrepreneurs may utilize basic photo editing tools to enhance product images, others may collaborate with digital artists or leverage AR plug ins provided by the platform. This variation presents both opportunities and challenges, as it opens space for creativity but also requires continuous upskilling and adaptation to evolving digital standards.

## **Virtual Art And Entrepreneurial Branding On Shopee Malaysia**

Shopee Malaysia has rapidly become a preferred e-commerce platform for micro and small enterprises (MSEs) seeking to expand their reach beyond traditional physical markets. Its accessible digital infrastructure and low entry barriers make it especially attractive for local entrepreneurs with limited capital. However, in the absence of large advertising budgets and professional marketing teams, many of these sellers turn to creative visual strategies as a core element of brand development. Virtual art becomes a crucial tool in helping these businesses craft a distinct identity, offering a low cost yet powerful way to stand out in a highly competitive digital marketplace (Kishor, 2024).

Entrepreneurs on Shopee often use a variety of visual assets such as stylized product images, themed storefront banners, illustrated promotional materials, and short animated clips to build their online presence. These visuals are not merely functional; they serve as emotional and aesthetic bridges between the seller and potential customers. A visually cohesive storefront signals professionalism and brand consistency, even when the seller operates as a small, independent business. For example, a seller offering traditional herbal skincare may incorporate botanical illustrations, earth toned palettes, and rustic textures into their product visuals, creating a brand narrative that emphasizes authenticity and nature inspired values.

The effectiveness of these branding techniques is supported by research that highlights the role of virtual aesthetics in shaping consumer behaviour. Studies have shown that consumers are more likely to trust and engage with online stores that feature rich, coherent, and visually appealing environments (Schapsis, 2025). High quality visuals can spark curiosity, improve brand recall, and foster an emotional connection with the product all of which are key drivers of consumer loyalty. Immersive visual experiences also contribute to increased dwell time on product pages, which is often positively correlated with conversion rates (Hajli et al., 2017). This suggests that virtual art not only enhances brand image but also plays a functional role in improving sales outcomes.

Moreover, the aesthetic appeal of virtual art allows sellers to target specific consumer segments more effectively. For instance, young consumers may be drawn to minimalist, trendy, or animated visuals that align with global design trends, while older or more traditional buyers may prefer visuals that evoke cultural familiarity or artisanal craftsmanship. This flexibility enables sellers to craft tailored visual identities that resonate with their desired market segments. Shopee's flexible seller interface supports such differentiation by allowing sellers to customize storefronts and upload multimedia content, giving even the smallest brands the tools to create meaningful visual interactions with customers.

In essence, virtual art has become more than just an optional enhancement it is a strategic asset in entrepreneurial branding on digital platforms like Shopee Malaysia. For many local entrepreneurs, the ability to convey brand values, story, and personality through virtual visuals has levelled the playing field in an otherwise saturated and competitive market. As the digital economy continues to grow, the ability to harness virtual art effectively will likely remain a key determinant of long-term success and consumer loyalty among small scale online retailers.

## Consumer Perception And Experience Of Virtual Art

From the standpoint of consumer behaviour, the use of virtual art in online retail environments plays a critical role in shaping how consumers perceive product value, brand trustworthiness, and overall quality. In the absence of physical interaction, visuals become the primary mode through which consumers assess a product's credibility and emotional appeal. According to Javornik (2016), augmented reality (AR) and other interactive digital visuals significantly improve the user experience by simulating real world interactions, thereby reducing the psychological gap between consumers and the product. This simulated interactivity provides a richer and more realistic understanding of the product, which can influence both cognitive and emotional responses to it.

Incorporating artistic and well-designed visuals into product listings also enhances memorability and perceived uniqueness. Alamdari et. al. (2022) demonstrate that when a product is presented through visually distinctive and artistic methods such as animated graphics, culturally themed backgrounds, or 3D visualizations it is more likely to be remembered and shared among peer networks. This “social shareability” factor indirectly boosts visibility, engagement, and even sales. In the context of platforms like Shopee, where user generated reviews, sharing functions, and social media integration are embedded, products with appealing visuals gain an edge by traveling further across digital channels, reinforcing brand recall and increasing return visits.

Demographics also play a significant role in determining how virtual art is received by online shoppers. In Malaysia, younger consumers especially Gen Z and Millennials demonstrate a strong preference for interactive, engaging, and aesthetically aligned digital content (Choi & Kim, 2016). These digital natives are accustomed to high design standards and are quick to judge product credibility based on visual cues. Visuals that incorporate elements of contemporary lifestyle, minimalist design, or cultural storytelling are more likely to resonate with this audience. For example, a local fashion brand that uses motion visuals or AR try on features may appeal more strongly to tech savvy consumers who value convenience and personalization in their shopping experiences. Refer to Figure 1 for a comparative example of a standard product image versus one enhanced with virtual art for cultural branding. This aligns with Wang et. al. (2024), who found emotional resonance increases with high quality interactive visuals in mobile commerce. Gen Z consumers, for example, prefer sleek visuals and AR tools when shopping online (Schapsis et. al. 2025).



**Figure 1. Comparative visual showing the difference between standard product photography and enhanced imagery using virtual art for improved engagement and cultural branding**  
(Source: Author's personal collection)

Virtual art also allows for the communication of cultural authenticity, a factor that resonates strongly in niche and identity-based markets. In multicultural societies like Malaysia, visuals that reflect traditional heritage such as local fabrics, motifs, or language can evoke emotional familiarity and trust

among specific consumer groups. This is especially relevant in promoting products rooted in local identity, such as handmade crafts, traditional snacks, or wellness items based on indigenous ingredients. The blending of cultural themes with digital design not only enhances aesthetic appeal but also positions the product within a narrative of authenticity and heritage a valuable asset in a globalized yet hyper personalized retail landscape (Xiong, 2024).

Furthermore, virtual art influences the perceived effort and professionalism of the seller, which in turn affects buyer trust. High quality visuals suggest that the seller has invested time and resources into product presentation, which is often interpreted by consumers as a proxy for product quality and reliability. Poor visuals, on the other hand, may create doubt or convey amateurism, even if the product itself is of good quality. As such, consumers tend to associate the sophistication of visual design with overall brand legitimacy, making virtual art not just a visual tool, but also a strategic signal of business credibility and care (Liu et. al. 2024).

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Challenges In Adoption Among Local Entrepreneurs**

Despite the clear advantages of incorporating virtual art into online retailing, local entrepreneurs in Malaysia continue to face significant barriers in its adoption. While e-commerce platforms such as Shopee provide sellers with the opportunity to reach a wider market, many are not fully equipped to capitalize on the visual demands of the digital economy. The limitations are not only technological but also educational, financial, and cognitive in nature, often affecting micro and small enterprises (MSEs) more acutely than larger competitors.

One of the most pressing challenges is the limited digital design literacy among many local entrepreneurs. Crafting professional grade visuals requires familiarity with design software, an understanding of visual hierarchy, colour theory, branding aesthetics, and often, animation tools. However, most small-scale business owners lack formal training in these areas. As Dagan et al. (2021) observe, many sellers rely on basic photo uploads and stock templates, which often fail to convey the uniqueness or quality of their products. Without access to the creative skills necessary to design compelling visuals, these entrepreneurs are at a disadvantage in attracting and retaining consumer attention in an increasingly image driven digital marketplace.

Another critical constraint is the financial cost associated with producing high quality virtual art. While larger brands can afford to hire digital designers, purchase premium design tools, or outsource AR/VR production, such investments are often beyond the reach of MSEs. According to Hajli et al. (2017), the cost of implementing advanced visual technologies, such as 3D modelling or interactive graphics, can be prohibitively high, particularly for entrepreneurs operating on tight margins. Even simpler forms of virtual art such as well-designed product banners or motion videos can incur additional costs if external designers or agencies are involved. As a result, many sellers continue to rely on low cost, do it yourself visuals, which may not meet the aesthetic expectations of modern consumers.

A more subtle but equally significant barrier is the lack of awareness regarding the importance of visual aesthetics in digital commerce. Some entrepreneurs underestimate the role of design in shaping consumer perceptions and decision making. They may view visuals as secondary to product quality or price, not realizing that in online contexts, aesthetics often serves as the first and most influential touchpoint for customers. This disconnect leads to missed opportunities in brand building, storytelling, and market positioning. For high quality local products that are poorly presented, this can be particularly

detrimental, as the visual experience fails to reflect the product's true value and craftsmanship (Liu et. al. 2024).

These challenges point to an urgent need for capacity building initiatives that equip entrepreneurs with the necessary tools and knowledge to engage effectively with virtual art. More accessible training programs, particularly those offered in local languages and tailored to the needs of MSEs, could help bridge the digital literacy gap. Government agencies, educational institutions, and e-commerce platforms themselves can play a pivotal role in delivering these programs. For instance, Shopee Malaysia could introduce integrated design toolkits, offer tutorials or design templates specifically for local sellers, or even create a marketplace that connects entrepreneurs with freelance digital artists at subsidized rates. By democratizing access to virtual art resources, such interventions would help ensure that local businesses are not left behind in the digital transformation.

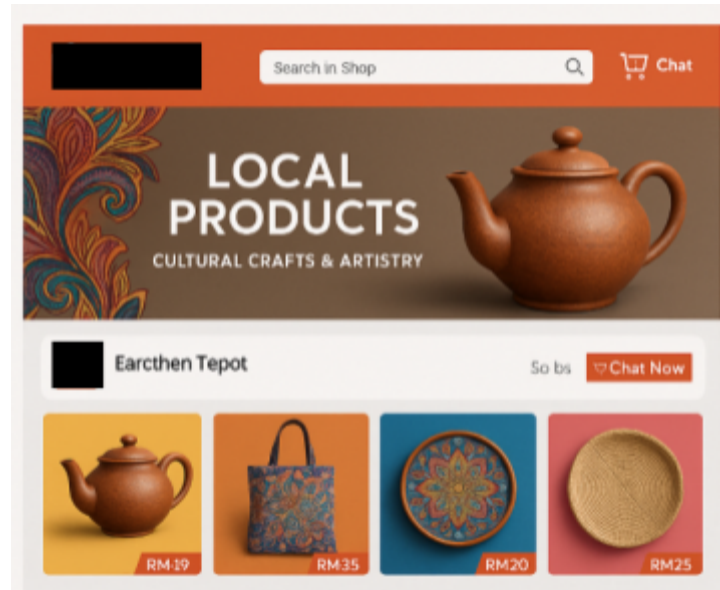
While virtual art holds transformative potential for local entrepreneurs in Malaysia, its full adoption is hindered by skill deficits, cost barriers, and limited awareness. Addressing these issues requires multi-stakeholder collaboration to foster digital creativity at the grassroots level. Without such support, the visual divide in e-commerce may continue to reinforce existing inequalities, leaving small-scale sellers unable to compete in an increasingly visual and experiential online economy.

## **Opportunities And Future Directions**

As Malaysia's digital economy matures, virtual art presents vast opportunities for enhancing the competitiveness of local entrepreneurs, particularly in the online retail ecosystem. The integration of creative visual elements into e-commerce is no longer a luxury but a strategic necessity in a landscape where consumer attention is fleeting and competition is intense. For small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), especially those operating through platforms like Shopee Malaysia, virtual art offers a scalable and cost-effective method to elevate brand identity, communicate value, and establish emotional resonance with consumers. Looking forward, these possibilities can be further unlocked through systemic support, collaborative models, and emerging technologies.

One of the most promising avenues for growth is the development of collaborative ecosystems between artists, entrepreneurs, and digital platforms. Shopee Malaysia, for instance, could introduce user friendly design toolkits or AI powered template generators that enable even non designers to create visually appealing product displays. Such tools, if embedded into the seller dashboard, would significantly lower the technical entry barrier for small business owners. Additionally, AI driven features could personalize visuals based on consumer browsing behaviour, enhancing relevance and engagement. These platform level innovations can accelerate the widespread adoption of virtual art and reduce reliance on costly third-party services.

Beyond platform support, cross sector collaborations also hold transformative potential. Local universities, especially those with design and multimedia faculties, could initiate service learning or internship programs where students co create branding visuals for SMEs. This mutually beneficial arrangement allows student artists to gain real world experience while helping entrepreneurs access affordable, culturally grounded visual content. Likewise, local design agencies and government linked programs (such as MARA or MDEC) can facilitate matchmaking initiatives between creatives and entrepreneurs, particularly those operating in rural or underserved communities. Embedding local heritage elements such as batik, singlet, or ethnic motifs into digital design not only enriches the virtual retail environment but also strengthens cultural continuity in the digital age (Wesnina et. al. 2025). Refer to Figure 2 for an example of a Shopee storefront showcasing local products with cultural artistry integrated into its digital design.



**Figure 2. Example of a Shopee storefront showcasing local products with integrated virtual art elements such as batik motifs, vibrant colours, and 3D product renderings**  
(Source: Author's personal collection)

The future of virtual art in e-commerce is also shaped by the emergence of Web 3.0 technologies, which promise a more immersive and decentralized digital experience. Features such as virtual showrooms, live 3D product demonstrations, and blockchain verified digital collectibles (NFTs) offer new modes of consumer interaction. Entrepreneurs could, for example, present their handmade or artisanal products within interactive virtual galleries, replicating the storytelling ambiance of a physical boutique. NFTs, though still nascent in Malaysia, may also serve as digital certificates of authenticity or limited-edition branding assets that appeal to younger, tech savvy consumers (Zaibon et. al. 2024). However, careful consideration must be given to ensure that such innovations are accessible and not exclusionary, particularly for sellers with limited digital infrastructure.

Nevertheless, realizing these opportunities requires more than technology; it necessitates inclusive, culturally sensitive, and economically viable strategies. Digital innovation must account for the local realities of Malaysian entrepreneurs, who often juggle multiple roles and face constraints in time, finances, and digital fluency. Training modules, either online or community based, should be developed in local languages and grounded in real case examples from the Malaysian market. Likewise, aesthetic design principles taught through these modules must reflect diverse local contexts, ensuring that virtual art does not become another form of digital homogenization but rather a medium for authentic cultural expression.

The evolution of virtual art in Malaysian e-commerce holds tremendous potential, especially when approached through an ecosystem lens that values collaboration, cultural context, and technological inclusivity. By empowering entrepreneurs with tools, skills, and networks, and by positioning virtual art not just as a marketing trend but as a vehicle for cultural storytelling and digital empowerment, Malaysia can chart a future where creative digital commerce becomes a hallmark of local entrepreneurship.



## CONCLUSION

Virtual art holds significant potential to transform the landscape of digital entrepreneurship in Malaysia. In the context of platforms like Shopee, where visibility and engagement are crucial for business survival, the role of virtual art has evolved from mere ornamentation to a strategic asset. For local entrepreneurs, particularly micro and small enterprises, the ability to present products through rich, interactive, and culturally resonant visuals can differentiate them from competitors and foster a deeper connection with consumers. As online marketplaces become increasingly saturated, the creative use of visual storytelling becomes an important determinant of consumer attention and loyalty.

Beyond its commercial value, virtual art also serves as a medium of identity and cultural expression. It allows local entrepreneurs to weave narratives rooted in heritage, lifestyle, and tradition into their product presentations. This is especially relevant in a multicultural society like Malaysia, where visual elements such as batik prints, traditional motifs, or kampung inspired aesthetics carry deep symbolic meaning. When effectively integrated into digital retail platforms, these visual cues do more than attract buyers; they reinforce a sense of authenticity and trust that is crucial for long term brand equity. Virtual art thus acts not only as a marketing instrument but also as a means of cultural continuity in a fast digitizing economy.

However, the transformative potential of virtual art is still not fully realized due to persistent barriers such as digital literacy gaps, financial constraints, and low awareness of design's strategic role in retail. While some sellers have begun to embrace digital visuals, many remain underserved or unaware of their benefits. Without access to affordable tools, training, or collaboration with design professionals, a large segment of local entrepreneurs' risks falling behind in the evolving digital economy. This disparity must be addressed through inclusive and scalable interventions that democratize access to digital aesthetics and equip entrepreneurs with the necessary creative and technical capabilities.

Moving forward, interventions should focus on capacity building and multi stakeholder collaboration. Government agencies, educational institutions, digital platforms, and creative communities each have a role to play in empowering entrepreneurs with design knowledge, technical resources, and creative partnerships. Workshops, mentorship programs, design grants, and AI powered design tools can reduce entry barriers and encourage experimentation with virtual art. Most importantly, these initiatives should be culturally contextualized and designed to meet the real world needs of Malaysian entrepreneurs, especially those from underserved or rural communities.

In conclusion, virtual art in retailing represents more than a passing trend; it is a strategic and cultural opportunity. When leveraged effectively, it enables Malaysian entrepreneurs to tell stories, elevate their products, and compete in increasingly visual digital marketplaces. Ensuring equitable access to this medium requires systemic support, sustained investment, and a collaborative ecosystem that bridges technology with creativity and local identity. By doing so, Malaysia can foster a generation of digitally empowered entrepreneurs who are both globally competitive and culturally grounded.

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