

Aesthetic Persuasion: How Artistic Packaging and Visual Storytelling Drive Cosmetic Brand Choices

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ABSTRACT

In the intensely competitive cosmetics market, brands must transcend mere functionality to engage consumers through sensory and emotional appeal. This study investigates how artistic packaging and visual storytelling serve as mechanisms of aesthetic persuasion that shape cosmetic brand choice, using the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) as a conceptual foundation. It is theorized that these aesthetic cues influence attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, which in turn affect purchase intention. To empirically validate the proposed framework, this study will employ a quantitative research design involving an online survey of 200 cosmetic consumers. Measurement items will be adapted from established scales in prior literature, ensuring content validity. Data will be analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to test the hypothesized relationships and assess the model's predictive power. The findings are expected to provide theoretical contributions by extending

TPB to aesthetic persuasion contexts and practical implications for cosmetic marketers aiming to leverage artistic branding strategies to influence consumer choice.

Keywords: *Aesthetic persuasion, Artistic packaging, Cosmetics marketing, Theory of planned behavior PLS-SEM, Visual storytelling*

INTRODUCTION

The cosmetics industry is among the most visually competitive markets worldwide, and Malaysia is no exception. Demand for beauty and skincare products continues to expand, fuelled by rising disposable incomes, evolving lifestyle trends, and the growing influence of social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok (Euromonitor International, 2023). In this highly saturated environment—where many brands offer products with similar functional qualities—visual and emotional appeal often becomes the deciding factor in consumer choice (Lee & Chen, 2022).

While product formulation and quality remain crucial, a brand's ability to capture attention on crowded shelves or within digital marketplaces often hinges on the artistry of its packaging and the strength of its visual storytelling (Kotler et al., 2021). Artistic packaging, which blends colour psychology, typography, material choice, and innovative structural design, does more than protect the product—it conveys brand personality, values, and lifestyle associations. Likewise, visual storytelling uses imagery, thematic design, and narrative consistency to forge emotional connections, helping consumers see the product as part of an aspirational or relatable lifestyle (Martinez, 2020).

Despite significant investment in these design strategies, many cosmetic brands struggle to convert aesthetic appeal into sustained customer loyalty and purchasing decisions. Packaging that is visually striking but lacks functional usability, brand stories that feel disconnected from product reality, or design elements that fail to stand out in visually cluttered environments can all undermine marketing impact (Chen & Lim, 2021). In both brick-and-mortar and online retail spaces, consumers are continuously bombarded with competing visuals, making it challenging for any single brand to create a lasting impression.

This study addresses this gap by applying the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) to investigate how artistic packaging and visual storytelling influence cosmetic purchase intentions. The TPB framework explains that behavioural intentions are shaped by three key factors: attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991). Here, the model is extended to incorporate aesthetic persuasion—positioning artistic packaging and visual narratives as core stimuli that can shape consumer attitudes, influence social norms, and enhance perceptions of purchase ease and desirability. By examining these relationships, the study aims to offer theoretical insights for academics and practical guidance for marketers seeking to design cosmetic products that resonate more deeply with today's beauty consumers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theory of Planned Behavior

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is one of the most established and widely applied models for predicting human behavioral intentions across a variety of fields, including consumer behavior,

environmental psychology, and health sciences (Ajzen, 1991). According to TPB, three key constructs—attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control—work together to shape an individual's intentions to act.

In consumer decision-making, *attitude* reflects how favorably or unfavorably a person evaluates a purchase. This evaluation can stem from logical reasoning, such as assessing product usefulness or cost-effectiveness, as well as from emotional reactions, like attachment to a brand or appreciation of its design (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). *Subjective norms* refer to the social pressures or expectations consumers perceive from those around them—friends, family, peers, or even influencers—about whether they should make a purchase (Armitage & Conner, 2001). *Perceived behavioral control* relates to a consumer's sense of how easy or difficult it is to perform the behavior, which can be shaped by factors such as budget, product availability, or even the practicality of the packaging.

Recent studies in the cosmetics industry have reaffirmed the relevance of TPB. For example, Ngo-Thi-Ngoc et al. (2024) found that TPB constructs effectively predicted purchase intentions for vegan cosmetics, with attitude emerging as the most influential factor. Similarly, Wilson and Edelyn (2024) confirmed the model's robustness in explaining purchases of eco-conscious beauty products. Building on this foundation, the current study integrates artistic packaging and visual storytelling as factors influencing the TPB constructs, expanding its application from purely functional or ethical product features to aesthetics-driven marketing strategies.

Artistic Packaging

In the beauty market, packaging functions like a silent salesperson—it conveys brand identity, signals quality, and creates emotional appeal without a single word (Underwood, 2003). Khan et al. (2021) captured these qualities in the VIEW model, which encompasses Visibility, Emotional appeal, Information, and Workability. Their research on beauty products in Oman showed that visibility, emotional appeal, and workability all significantly influenced purchase intention, while the informational content had little direct effect. This highlights that, in beauty contexts, consumers often respond more strongly to sensory and practical elements than to written product details.

Visibility describes how effectively a product stands out—whether on a store shelf or in an online listing. Emotional appeal is the connection sparked through colors, shapes, and materials that resonate with the consumer's feelings. Workability relates to functional ease of use, such as ergonomic shapes or resealable containers, which enhance convenience. Packaging research supports these points, showing that visual cues like typography, color palettes, and texture can influence subconscious emotional responses, ultimately shaping brand perceptions and purchase decisions (Orth & Malkewitz, 2008; Silayoi & Speece, 2007).

In cosmetics specifically, artistic packaging often signals luxury and exclusivity (Ko et al., 2019). Sometimes, the packaging itself becomes a collectible aspect of the product, adding to its perceived value (Bloch, 1995). The VIEW model therefore offers a practical lens to understand how these artistic elements encourage consumer engagement and purchase behavior.

Visual Storytelling

Visual storytelling takes packaging design a step further by embedding a narrative into the consumer experience. This can be achieved through imagery that reflects a lifestyle, typography that captures a brand's personality, or a cohesive theme that communicates heritage, values, or a mission

(Escalas, 2004). By creating a narrative, brands foster emotional bonds with consumers, allowing them to see the product as part of their own personal story (Fog et al., 2010).

As a component of sensory branding, visual storytelling focuses on the visual dimension, complementing other sensory cues used in retail environments (Krishna, 2012). In the cosmetics industry, it can be used to communicate messages of sustainability, artisanal craftsmanship, or aspirational luxury—often without the need for words.

Empirical evidence underscores the strength of this approach. Wiedmann et al. (2018) found that storytelling in luxury brands enhanced perceptions of authenticity and deepened emotional connections, which in turn increased purchase intention. In mass-market beauty, thematic visuals—such as nature-inspired designs for organic products—can foster trust and help brands stand out in saturated markets (Liao & Ma, 2009).

Purchase Intention

Purchase intention refers to a consumer's conscious plan or willingness to purchase a specific product in the near future (Ajzen, 1991). It is a pivotal predictor of actual buying behavior, acting as an essential bridge between cognitive and affective states and market outcomes (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

In the cosmetics industry, purchase intention is heavily shaped not just by the product's functional attributes but by the aesthetic qualities of its packaging. Numerous studies have demonstrated how visual and tactile packaging elements—such as material, color, and overall design—play a key role in influencing consumers' intent to purchase beauty products.

Thus, in the realm of cosmetic products, purchase intention is not merely a function of perceived product performance but is heavily shaped by the visual and emotional impact of aesthetic packaging. Understanding this relationship is essential for brands aiming to convert consumer interest into actual sales, especially in competitive beauty markets where differentiation through sensory and artistic design can be a decisive success factor.

HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Artistic Packaging and Attitude Toward Purchasing Cosmetic Products

Packaging serves as a vital component of a product's marketing mix, often functioning as the first point of interaction between the consumer and the brand. In the cosmetic industry, where sensory appeal and emotional connection play a crucial role, artistic packaging goes beyond functional protection to convey brand identity, aesthetic value, and emotional resonance (Silayoi & Speece, 2007). Artistic packaging, characterized by unique shapes, colors, typography, and design elements, can evoke positive emotions, enhance perceived product quality, and create a sense of exclusivity (Orth & Malkewitz, 2008). From a Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) perspective, such positive emotional and cognitive evaluations can strengthen a consumer's attitude toward purchasing the product. Therefore, it is expected that aesthetically appealing packaging will foster more favorable attitudes toward the purchase decision.

H1a. Artistic packaging positively influences attitude toward purchasing the cosmetic product.

Visual Storytelling and Attitude Toward Purchasing Cosmetic Products

Visual storytelling in cosmetics marketing uses imagery, symbols, and narrative-driven design to communicate the brand's personality, heritage, and emotional promise (Escalas, 2004). Through packaging, advertising, and brand visuals, storytelling enables consumers to connect personally with the product by framing it within relatable or aspirational narratives. This connection can stimulate emotional engagement, enhance brand authenticity, and create a more immersive consumer experience (Lundqvist et al., 2013). According to TPB, such emotionally rich and meaningful communication can shape favorable attitudes toward purchasing, as consumers tend to value brands that align with their personal identity and aspirations.

H1b. Visual storytelling positively influences attitude toward purchasing the cosmetic product.

Artistic Packaging and Subjective Norms

Artistic packaging can act as a social signal, conveying status, sophistication, or trend alignment. In cosmetics, visually distinctive packaging often communicates fashionability and exclusivity, which can heighten perceived social approval from peers and reference groups (Ko et al., 2019). When consumers see a product as socially desirable due to its design aesthetics, they are more likely to perceive a normative expectation to purchase (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019).

H2a: Artistic packaging positively influences subjective norms concerning purchasing the cosmetic product.

Visual Storytelling and Subjective Norms

Visual storytelling aligns products with shared cultural symbols, influencer-driven aesthetics, or lifestyle narratives that resonate with social identity (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2022). Such alignment can strengthen consumers' perception that significant others would approve of the purchase, thereby reinforcing normative pressures (Ko & Kim, 2023).

H2b: Visual storytelling positively influences subjective norms concerning purchasing the cosmetic product.

Artistic Packaging and Perceived Behavioral Control

Functional design elements within artistic packaging—such as ergonomic shapes, intuitive opening mechanisms, and clear usage instructions—can reduce perceived complexity in using cosmetic products (Naseri et al., 2024). By lowering functional barriers, aesthetically designed yet practical packaging enhances consumers' sense of control over the purchase and use process.

H3a: Artistic packaging positively influences perceived behavioral control regarding purchasing the cosmetic product.

Visual Storytelling and Perceived Behavioral Control

When visual storytelling communicates clear usage scenarios and product benefits, it can reduce uncertainty and increase consumers' perceived ability to use the product effectively (Chang et al., 2023). By framing the product's role in everyday beauty routines, storytelling boosts confidence in purchase and application.

H3b: Visual storytelling positively influences perceived behavioral control regarding purchasing the cosmetic product.

Direct Effects on Purchase Intention

Aesthetic packaging and compelling visual narratives can also prompt direct purchase motivations (e.g., impulse buys, affect-driven decisions) independent of TPB mediators (Khan et al., 2021; Mazoon et al., 2024). Therefore:

H4. Artistic packaging positively influences purchase intention for the cosmetic product.

H5. Visual storytelling positively influences purchase intention for the cosmetic product.

TPB Predictors to Purchase Intention

Central to TPB, attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control are well-documented predictors of behavioral intention across consumer contexts, including cosmetics (Ngo-Thi-Ngoc et al., 2024; Wilson & Edelyn, 2024). Thus, stronger positive attitudes, perceived social approval, and confidence in usage are expected to increase purchase intention for cosmetics framed through artistic packaging and storytelling.

H6. Attitude toward purchasing the cosmetic product positively influences purchase intention.

H7. Subjective norms towards purchasing the cosmetic product positively influence purchase intention

H8. Perceived behavioral control positively influences purchase intention.

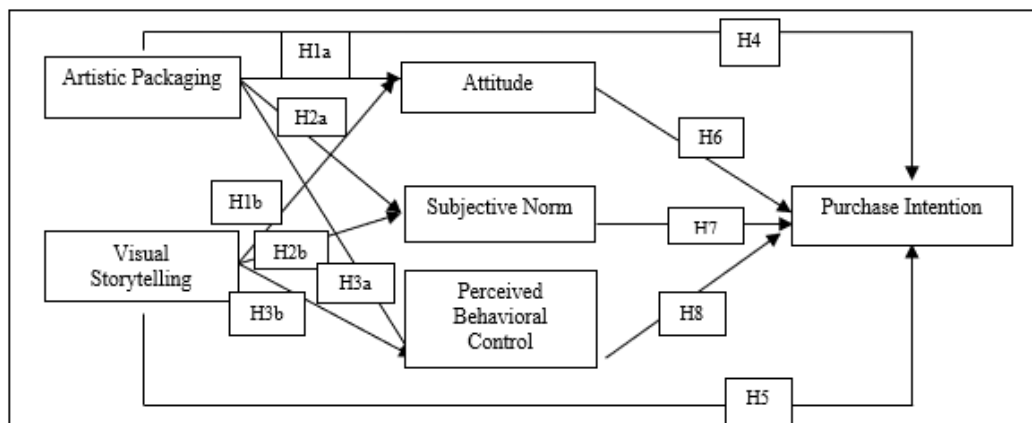


Figure 1. The Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a quantitative research approach, gathering data through an online survey targeted at individuals living in urban areas of Malaysia. The participants will be aged 18 and above, chosen through purposive sampling to ensure they have prior experience purchasing cosmetic products. This age group is considered highly relevant due to its broad range in purchasing power, active presence on digital and social media platforms, and differing levels of responsiveness to marketing elements such as artistic packaging and visual storytelling (Ng et al., 2022).

A total of 200 respondents will be recruited through social media, email, and online community groups, ensuring that all participants have relevant purchasing experience. The survey will begin with demographic questions—covering age, gender, education level, monthly income, and length of residence in urban Malaysia—before moving on to items measuring the study's key constructs: artistic packaging, visual storytelling, attitude toward purchasing, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, and purchase intention. All measurement items will be adapted from well-established, validated scales and rated using a five-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” (Ajzen, 1991; Wang et al., 2020).

Data will be analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM), allowing for a detailed assessment of the hypothesised relationships between variables and the strength of the proposed conceptual framework (Hair et al., 2017). This approach aims to offer a clear and in-depth understanding of how artistic packaging and visual storytelling influence cosmetic purchase intentions among urban Malaysian consumers aged 18 and above.

EXPECTED FINDINGS

It is anticipated that this study will reveal that both artistic packaging and visual storytelling strongly influence consumer attitudes toward cosmetic products. In particular, young adults and middle-aged consumers are expected to show a heightened emotional response to aesthetically appealing designs, which may lead to more favorable purchase intentions. The findings are also likely to highlight generational nuances, with Gen Z and Millennials being more influenced by creative, Instagram-worthy packaging, while Gen X and older consumers may respond more to storytelling that reflects quality, heritage, and authenticity. Moreover, it is expected that the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) framework will show a consistent pattern: artistic packaging and visual storytelling not only enhance attitude but also shape subjective norms (perceived social expectations) and perceived behavioral control (the ease or difficulty of making the purchase). The role of emotional appeal as a moderator is predicted to amplify these effects, particularly among consumers who value self-expression and identity through cosmetic products.

CONCLUSION

This research emphasizes the growing importance of aesthetics in marketing, particularly in the cosmetics industry, where competition is fierce, and consumers often decide with their hearts before their minds. By applying the TPB model, the study bridges rational decision-making processes with emotional triggers, providing deeper insight into how art-driven elements can push consumers toward purchase. The results

are expected to support the idea that aesthetic marketing—when executed thoughtfully—can move beyond being “just pretty” to becoming a powerful driver of consumer behavior. This offers valuable lessons for brands: a packaging redesign or a refreshed visual storytelling campaign could do more than boost sales; it can strengthen brand connection and loyalty across generations.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the sample is limited to 200 urban Malaysian consumers aged 18 years and above, which may restrict generalisability to rural populations or consumers in other cultural contexts. Second, the cross-sectional survey design captures consumer perceptions at a single point in time, limiting the ability to assess changes in behaviour over time. Third, self-reported data may be subject to social desirability bias, particularly when measuring socially influenced constructs like subjective norms. Fourth, while the study focuses on artistic packaging and visual storytelling, other influential marketing factors such as price perception, product quality, and brand reputation are not examined, potentially omitting important determinants of purchase intention. Future research could adopt a longitudinal approach, use larger and more diverse samples, and incorporate additional variables to provide a more holistic understanding of cosmetic purchase behaviour.

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