

# OPTIMIZING DIGITAL MARKETING FOR MSMEs THROUGH CREATIVE DESIGN AND VISUAL BRANDING OF PALIMA FOODS

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## Abstract

*The digital transformation of the marketing landscape presents significant opportunities and challenges for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) seeking to expand reach and enhance competitiveness. This literature-based research analyzes the integration of creative design and visual branding as an innovative digital marketing strategy, assessing its impact on increasing brand awareness and strengthening MSME market identity. Creative design shapes initial perceptions, while visual branding builds a consistent narrative and differentiates businesses. Leveraging digital platforms, the synergy between design creativity and visual coherence expands exposure, stimulates interaction, and builds emotional connections. Literature analysis indicates MSMEs strategically integrating these elements are better positioned for visibility, customer loyalty, and a strengthened competitive position. This study contributes to existing scholarship by offering a comprehensive analysis of the synergistic integration of creative design and visual branding as a strategic innovation for MSMEs, a dimension often underexplored in favor of individual components or broader digital strategies. The research emphasizes design-based innovation as vital for MSME sustainability. The implications are twofold: theoretically, it enriches literature by highlighting the critical role of visual integration; practically, it provides a vital guide for MSMEs to reframe visual branding as a strategic investment, ultimately enhancing competitiveness and fostering sustainable consumer loyalty.*

**Keywords:** *creative design, brand awareness, digital marketing, MSMEs, visual branding*

## INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digitalization over the last two decades has fundamentally altered the global business landscape, ushering in new paradigms in business-consumer interactions. This transformation affects various aspects, from communication strategies and distribution channels to marketing methodologies. The proliferation of social media, e-commerce platforms, and numerous other digital channels has not only broadened access to information but has also significantly created opportunities for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) to extend their market reach beyond traditional geographical confines (Amory, Mudo, & Rhena, 2025; Setini et al., 2025). In Indonesia, MSMEs are pivotal as the primary engine of the national economy, making substantial contributions to Gross Domestic Product (GDP), employment generation, and the reinforcement of the populace's economic structure

(Hakim, 2024; BPS, 2023). The MSME sector serves as a critical foundation for achieving inclusive and sustainable economic growth, yet it continues to encounter various challenges in adapting to the dynamics of the contemporary market.

Despite their significant potential, many MSMEs still face considerable limitations in implementing effective digital marketing strategies. A primary obstacle lies in the suboptimal management of brand image (branding) and visual communication. Many MSME stakeholders are not fully cognizant that visual branding is not merely an aesthetic element but a strategic instrument capable of strengthening market identity and fostering consumer trust (Budiarti, 2024; Dawami, 2025). This challenge is becoming increasingly complex amidst intense global competition, where contemporary consumers exhibit highly diverse preferences, elevated expectations, and substantial bargaining power due to the ease of digital information access. In this context, MSMEs are compelled to stand out, be readily recognizable, and offer added value that distinguishes them from their competitors. This necessitates not only innovation in product design but also consistency in a visual strategy integrated across various digital channels. Without strong differentiation and effective visual communication, MSMEs risk becoming lost in the dense flow of information and forfeiting opportunities to cultivate consumer loyalty. The capacity for professional brand management is a determining factor for the competitiveness of MSMEs, both domestically and within the increasingly competitive global market arena.

Palima Foods, an MSME based in Depok City, operates within the processed food industry, specializing in dim sum products. Established by Wiji Rahayu approximately two years and six months ago, Palima Foods has cultivated a customer base through direct sales, a network of resellers, and participation in various bazaars. With a team of three employees, this company prioritizes exceptional product quality, delectable taste, and competitive pricing. Product quality excellence serves as the primary asset for maintaining customer loyalty. Nevertheless, Palima Foods encounters several challenges in its business expansion. A significant issue is the suboptimal growth of sales revenue. Currently, the majority of sales depend on a network of 15 resellers, who contribute substantially to overall revenue. However, there is a strong aspiration to enhance independent sales and broaden market reach.

The "Palima Foods" brand has not been actively leveraged in marketing efforts, thereby hindering market expansion and brand identity consolidation. Bazaar participation is also constrained by the relatively high cost of space rental, impacting profit margins. The utilization of social media as a promotional tool has not significantly contributed to revenue increase, owing to a lack of effective strategies in content management, customer relationship building, and the direction of audiences to sales platforms (Assidqi et al., 2025). Additionally, inconsistencies have been observed in the usage of business logos, potentially confusing consumers and impeding the process of accessing product information (Harahap & Nainggolan, 2025). There are also limitations in the visual design of product packaging and promotional photography, which have not yet effectively showcased the superior quality of the dim sum produced (Praditya & Isnaini, 2025). Moreover, the absence of an attractive and representative exhibition booth design limits the potential for increased sales through physical engagements.

Consequently, this research focuses on analyzing the integration of creative design and visual branding within digital marketing strategies as an innovation capable of enhancing brand awareness and strengthening the identity of the MSME market.

Creative design, manifested through visual elements such as logos, typography, colors, and layouts, is regarded as a crucial aspect in establishing a strong and consistent initial impression (Usman, 2025). Concurrently, visual branding plays a pivotal role in constructing brand narratives and differentiation, thereby facilitating consumer recognition and recall (Nelsa, 2024). By leveraging digital platforms, the synergy between design creativity and visual identity coherence can expand exposure, amplify interaction, and foster emotional connections with consumers. While existing literature acknowledges the importance of digital marketing for MSMEs and the distinct roles of creative design and visual branding, there remains a notable research gap in comprehensively analyzing their synergistic integration as a strategic innovation specifically for enhancing brand awareness and strengthening MSME market identity.

Many studies focus on individual elements or broad digital strategies, often overlooking the nuanced interplay and combined impact of these visual components, particularly for resource-constrained MSMEs (Jadhav, Gaikwad, & Bapat, 2023). This literature-based research addresses this gap by synthesizing current scholarly findings to elucidate how this integrated approach forms a powerful, yet often underexplored, strategy for MSMEs to navigate fierce digital competition. By mapping the conceptual landscape of creative design and visual branding within digital marketing, this study contributes academically by providing a consolidated understanding of their combined efficacy and offering a foundational framework for future empirical investigations. The research aims to investigate how the integration of these two visual elements can serve as an effective strategy for MSMEs in navigating increasingly fierce digital competition.

The geographical context of Depok City, the operational base of Palima Foods, possesses distinct demographic and economic characteristics. With a growing population predominantly comprising the productive age demographic, Depok represents a potential market for processed food products such as dim sum. Furthermore, the high rate of internet penetration in Depok offers significant opportunities for digital marketing initiatives. However, intense business competition also presents a considerable challenge for MSMEs. Consequently, effective and innovative marketing strategies are indispensable for market penetration and success.

This research aims to propose solutions to the challenges faced by Palima Foods through the implementation of integrated digital marketing strategies and creative design. Specifically, this research seeks to analyze MSMEs' capacity for effective social media management, the creation of attractive and professional visual content, comprehension of the importance of brand consistency, and to assess the impact of increased sales turnover resulting from the optimization of digital marketing strategies and creative design.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Digital Marketing Concepts**

Digital marketing encompasses all marketing efforts that leverage electronic devices or the internet to connect businesses with customers, including search engines, social media, email, and company websites (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019; Setini et al., 2025). Digital transformation has unlocked novel opportunities for MSMEs to reach broader markets and cultivate more personal relationships with consumers, thereby enhancing brand visibility and direct interaction (Amory et al., 2025; Hakim, 2024). Contemporary research underscores the significance of integrated digital marketing

strategies, which include the deployment of engaging digital content and fostering two-way consumer interaction, for improving the business performance of MSMEs (Anita, Simanihuruk, Kusumawardhani, & Wijaya, 2025; Adhikari & Molla, 2024). For MSMEs operating in competitive markets, a profound understanding of prevailing trends, such as influencer marketing and digital consumer data analysis, is paramount for success (Simanungkalit & Nawawi, 2025).

### **Creative Design Concepts in Marketing**

Creative design transcends mere aesthetics; it functions as a visual communication strategy meticulously crafted to represent a brand's identity, values, and personality (Usman, 2025). Visual elements such as logos, color palettes, typography, and layout are instrumental in forging a strong first impression, cultivating emotional associations, and shaping consumer perception (Atamtajani, Ramadhan & Cantika, 2025). Within the information-saturated digital marketing landscape, innovative and relevant design serves as the primary gateway for consumers to recognize, remember, and evaluate a brand, thereby differentiating it from competitors (Azhari, Tanjung, Sagala, Manurung & Hayati, 2025). The distinctiveness of visual design not only enhances product appeal but also acts as a strategic vehicle for indelibly and consistently embedding brand identity in consumers' minds, establishing it as a key market differentiator (Saputra, Nugroho, Hartanto, Andraini & Kusumasari, 2025). Consequently, creative design acts as the initial catalyst, capturing consumer attention through novel and innovative visual elements.

### **Visual Branding Concept**

Visual branding serves as the bedrock of a brand's identity, manifest through consistent visual elements such as logos, color schemes, typography, and distinct stylistic choices (Putri & Yulianto, 2025). Its primary function is to facilitate rapid and memorable brand recognition amidst the deluge of digital information. The coherence of these visual elements is instrumental in building credibility, professionalism, and trust in the brand (Dawami, 2025; Harahap & Nainggolan, 2025). In the digital era, where initial consumer interactions frequently occur via visual displays, the impact of consistent visual branding emerges as a significant differentiator, rendering a brand professional and trustworthy (Muliati, 2025; Fathonah, Wati, & Winarno, 2024). A robust visual brand also underpins a solid market identity, which is indispensable for MSMEs to differentiate their products from competitors and fortify their market position (Nelsa, 2024). Visual branding builds upon the initial impression created by creative design, ensuring that the message conveyed is consistent and coherent across diverse digital communication channels, thereby reinforcing the brand's identity and narrative.

### **Brand Awareness**

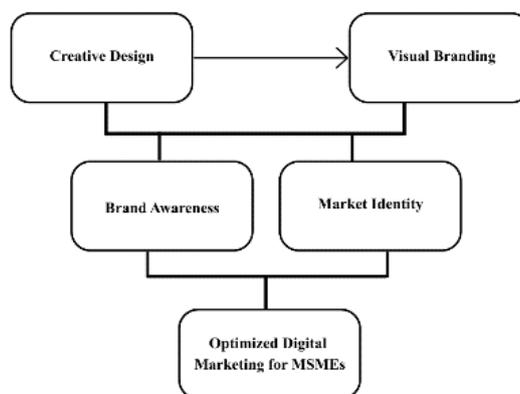
Brand awareness, defined as the extent to which consumers recognize or recall a brand, represents a critical initial stage in the customer journey for cultivating deeper brand relationships. It manifests in two forms: brand recognition (identifying a brand upon sight) and brand recall (remembering a brand without visual cues). Enhanced brand awareness can be attained through consistent visual communication and appealing design (Usman, 2025); brands possessing a unique and cohesive visual identity are more likely to be remembered by consumers than generic alternatives (Praditya & Isnaini,

2025). Within digital marketing, strong and memorable visuals are paramount for capturing audience attention and effectively elevating brand awareness (Praditya & Isnaini, 2025). The impact of consistent visual branding, driven by creative design, directly contributes to increased brand awareness, as memorable and cohesive visuals are paramount for capturing audience attention and elevating recall.

### Market Identity

The identity of the MSME market encompasses the values, vision, narrative, and meaning a brand aims to convey to its audience, extending beyond mere products or services. A robust market identity enables consumers to comprehend the underlying rationale for selecting a specific product or service. Visual narratives function as the principal medium for bridging brand values with consumer perceptions. MSMEs adept at presenting a consistent visual narrative can more readily establish profound emotional connections with consumers (Chyntia et al., 2025; Firdaus et al., 2025; Nelsa, 2024). Such an identity can be further solidified by illustrating local culture, regional distinctiveness, or the personal narratives underpinning the business, all of which should be reflected across the brand's visual elements. A clearly defined and visually articulated market identity empowers MSMEs to forge strong positioning and effectively differentiate themselves from competitors (Budiarti, 2024). A robust visual brand, consistently applied through creative design, is instrumental in articulating this market identity, enabling MSMEs to forge strong positioning and effectively differentiate themselves from competitors.

### Conceptual Integration and Proposed Model



**Figure 1. Conceptual Framework**

The subsections above define the key constructs individually. To achieve greater conceptual cohesion and clarity, these elements are integrated as follows: Creative design acts as the foundational element, shaping initial consumer perceptions and capturing attention through novel visual elements. This initial appeal is then consolidated and sustained by visual branding, which ensures consistency of message, identity, and professionalism across all digital touchpoints. This consistent visual presentation, driven by creative design, directly contributes to brand awareness, making the brand recognizable and memorable. Ultimately, the synergistic effect of creative design and consistent visual branding reinforces the market identity of the MSME, enabling stronger differentiation, consumer trust, and emotional connections. This integrated approach is crucial for optimizing digital marketing strategies, leading to

enhanced business performance. To visually represent these interconnected relationships and enhance clarity, a schematic conceptual model is proposed (Figure 1). This model illustrates the hypothesized flow from creative design and visual branding, through their impact on brand awareness and market identity, leading to optimized digital marketing outcomes for MSMEs.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This research adopts a literature review approach to comprehensively analyze the integration of creative design and visual branding within digital marketing strategies as an innovation aimed at increasing brand awareness and market identity for MSMEs. This methodology was selected due to the topic's dynamic and evolving nature, necessitating a critical synthesis of existing literature to map key concepts, identify research gaps, and explore avenues for further study development (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018; Booth, Colomb, Williams, Bizup, & FitzGerald, 2016). This approach enables the construction of robust arguments based on established scientific knowledge and the formulation of relevant practical recommendations for case studies, such as Palima Foods, without requiring direct primary data collection.

The primary data sources for this research comprise scientific articles, conference proceedings, academic books, and pertinent research reports. This literature corpus was curated from internationally recognized academic database repositories, including Emerald, alongside other leading academic databases and accredited national journals (SINTA). To ensure the relevance and timeliness of the findings, this literature review exclusively focuses on publications from the past five years, specifically 2020 to 2025. This temporal scope was chosen to ground the discussion in the latest trends and discoveries in digital marketing, creative design, branding, and MSME development (Jadhav et al., 2023; Setini et al., 2025). The literature selection process adhered to specific criteria to ensure relevance and quality. Inclusion criteria included: (1) peer-reviewed academic publications, (2) direct relevance to the integration of creative design, visual branding, and digital marketing for MSMEs, (3) published between 2020 and 2025, and (4) accessible full-text articles. Exclusion criteria involved: (1) non-academic sources (e.g., blogs, news articles without scholarly backing), (2) publications outside the specified date range, (3) articles not available in English or Indonesian, and (4) studies focusing solely on technical aspects of digital marketing without considering visual strategies.

Data analysis was conducted using a thematic analysis approach. The initial phase involved identifying relevant keywords (e.g., "MSME digital marketing," "creative design," "visual branding," "brand awareness," "market identity," "visual strategy") to perform a systematic literature search (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Through this systematic search and application of inclusion/exclusion criteria, a total of 15 relevant sources were identified and analyzed. Subsequently, the selected literature was categorized into several crucial main themes: the role of creative design in the digital marketing landscape, the function of visual branding in shaping brand identity, the synergistic impact of integrating these elements on brand awareness, and their implementation strategies within the operational context of MSMEs. The results of this categorization were then comprehensively synthesized to identify patterns, similarities, and differences across previous studies. Through this synthesis, identifying research gaps became a focal point, particularly concerning the limited research that specifically

integrates creative design and visual branding within digital marketing strategies for SMEs applicable to specific business contexts like Palima Foods.

**Table 1. Key References and Their Contributions**

No	Author(s) & Year	Focus	Findings
1	Amory et.al (2025)	Digital Economy Transformation and the Evolution of Consumption Patterns: A Literature Review on Changing Shopping Behavior in the Internet Era.	Digitalization has fundamentally shifted consumer preferences, resulting in a move from conventional shopping to online shopping. This change is primarily driven by the increased utilization of e-commerce platforms, sharing economy services, and digital payment methods.
2	Adhikari & Molla (2024)	The Role of Digital Marketing in Enhancing Market Reach and Customer Engagement in Nepalese Enterprises. Shankar Nath Adhikari & Nasiruddin Molla	All five Digital Marketing parameters (Social Media Presence, Budget, Content Quality, Website Optimization, Data Analytics) significantly enhance market reach and customer engagement. Social Media Presence is the most critical factor, explaining 56.5% of the variance.
3	Anita, Simanihuruk, Kusumawardhani, & Wijaya (2025)	Digital Marketing Strategies and Their Impact on Customer Satisfaction and Brand Loyalty.	Service quality, online presence perception, promotion effectiveness, and social media engagement significantly influence customer satisfaction with digital marketing. Digital engagement and digital promotions showed no significant effect on customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction with digital marketing was not found to have a significant influence on brand loyalty in the context of four-star hotels in Jakarta.
4	Assidqi, Salwa, Husna, Lista, Azizah, Oktafiani, & Rohim (2025)	The Utilization of Social Media as a Digital Marketing Strategy for eLAIL Handmade Bag MSME.	The MSME faced low sales and poor public recognition due to challenges in social media and e-commerce marketing. The community service activities (optimizing social media and e-commerce) successfully increased product sales and enhanced the MSME's brand recognition among the local community.
5	Budiarti (2024)	The Vital Role of Design Branding in Enhancing Business Competitiveness and Supporting MSME Growth	Design Branding is vital for MSME long-term growth; it boosts customer trust, builds emotional connection, and ensures brand recognition through visual and communication consistency.
6	Chyntia, Wardana, Rahmalia, Ulfira, Aisy, Harif, Pratama, & Hutasoit (2025)	Appealing Packaging, Increased Product: Packaging Design Education for MSME Branding Strengthening	Educational program focused on teaching MSMEs to create attractive and effective packaging to enhance product appeal, increase sales value, and ultimately boost brand awareness and consumer loyalty

**Table 2. Key References and Their Contributions (cont.)**

No	Author(s) & Year	Focus	Findings
7	Syairozi & Azizah (2025)	Enhancing SME Competitiveness Through the Implementation of Strategic Management Based on Local Business Innovation.	Local Business Innovation directly and significantly impacts SME Competitiveness and Innovation Performance. Strategic Management only affects Competitiveness indirectly, via Innovation Performance (the most decisive factor).
8	Saputri, Fianty, & Dewi (2023)	Visual Branding Strategies For Culinary Msmes In Legok Village: A Community-Centered Approach Through Design Training.	Community-based training on logo and packaging design has a significantly positive impact on the visual identity, enhancing the competitiveness and sustainability of culinary MSMEs.
9	Setini, Amerta, Indiani, Laksmi, Triandini, Purwatiningsih, Suardana (2025)	Digital Marketing Strategy As A Catalyst For SME Growth In The Modern Era.	Digital Marketing is highly effective and crucial for SME Growth, acting as a catalyst by facilitating market access, promoting products, and maintaining competitive advantage in the modern era.
10	Elvionita, Hasibuan, Rahayu, Pasaribu, & Pasaribu (2025)	The Influence of Digital Marketing and product Quality on Purchase Decisions: Literature Review.	Digital Marketing has a positive influence on consumer purchasing decisions. Product Quality has a positive influence on consumer purchasing decisions.
11	Muliati (2025)	Digital Transformation of Village MSMEs: Integration of Visual Design and Digitalization Education in Muara Badak Ilir.	Digital transformation activities (logo redesign, e-commerce training, and QR code implementation) significantly help MSMEs improve product branding, operational efficiency, and overall business growth.
12	Putri & Yulianto (2025)	Visual Branding Design to Increase Brand Awareness of Gerbang Taru Bali.	The Visual Branding design process (including creating a brand guideline and visual elements) significantly and successfully increased brand awareness and recognition for Gerbang Taru Bali MSME.
13	Usman (2025)	Visual Communication in Branding: The Role of Graphic Design in Building Brand Identity.	Consistency of visual elements (logo, color, typography) across platforms strengthens brand image, increases customer loyalty, and creates market competitiveness. Maintaining design quality and innovation is crucial for long-term relevance

To ensure the validity and objectivity of the study's outcomes, this research strictly prioritizes primary literature that has undergone peer review and been published in reputable journals. A comparative analysis of findings from various literature sources

was performed to yield a comprehensive and unbiased analytical outcome. The analysis was executed critically, moving beyond mere summarization to deeply evaluate the strengths and limitations of existing studies. Through this structured and critical literature study methodology, this research is expected to offer a theoretical contribution in the form of comprehensive concept mapping and the development of a conceptual model explaining how the integration of creative design and visual branding can function as an effective innovative strategy for enhancing the competitiveness, brand awareness, and market identity of MSMEs in the dynamic digital era.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Visual Gaps in Digital Marketing Research for MSMEs and the Role of Differentiating Visual Elements**

Existing research on digital marketing for SMEs, while extensively covering operational technical aspects such as social media platform utilization and digital advertising strategies (Amory et al., 2025), has often failed to provide sufficient attention to an in-depth exploration of creative design and visual branding as the primary pillars of differentiation strategies. This dominant focus on the technical dimension frequently overlooks the fact that consumers' initial brand perception is heavily influenced by visual appearance (Saputra et al., 2025). In the highly competitive digital market, where consumers are bombarded with vast amounts of visual information, visual elements become key differentiators that directly determine brand appeal and influence purchasing decisions (Azhari et al., 2025). Modern consumers often lack the inclination or time for detailed product analysis, making the initial impression formed through visual appearance a crucial determinant. Consequently, strategically positioning creative design and visual branding not only strengthens brand image but also confers a difficult-to-imitate competitive advantage. This literature review confirms that future research directions should shift from a sole focus on the technical aspects of digital platforms towards a more holistic understanding of the role of visual elements in shaping market perceptions, building trust, and reinforcing brand identity within the ever-evolving digital ecosystem (Setini et al., 2025). Creative design has been demonstrably proven to significantly contribute to product and service differentiation for MSMEs. Unique designs effectively create their own appeal, enabling consumers to distinguish one brand from another. Studies indicate that consumers are more likely to interact with brands offering innovative visual designs compared to those employing generic designs (Atamtajani et al., 2025). This underscores that creative design functions not merely as an aesthetic complement but as a strategic means to indelibly and consistently embed brand identity in consumers' minds.

### **Challenges for MSMEs in Implementing Effective Creative Design and Visual Branding**

The resource limitations frequently experienced by many MSMEs, encompassing both design expertise and budget allocation, often lead to the adoption of simplistic designs or visual elements that tend to be uniform with competitors (Budiarti, 2024). This condition results in less-than-optimal brand messaging, making it difficult to create a distinct and lasting impression in consumers' minds. Within a highly competitive market, these limitations place MSMEs at a significant disadvantage against larger companies with more professional visual capabilities. This disparity

highlights research opportunities to explore how MSMEs can overcome resource constraints while still delivering effective creative designs. Some literature suggests that utilizing digital technology with user-friendly design tools and strategic collaboration with independent designers can offer promising alternative solutions (Muliati, 2025). Furthermore, continuous education on the importance of investing in creative design is essential, as many MSME actors still perceive design as a mere ornamental addition rather than a strategic marketing element. The specific issues at Palima Foods, including logo inconsistency, packaging design that fails to highlight quality, and unappealing promotional photos, reflect these challenges that require appropriate visual strategies for resolution.

### **The Crucial Role of Visual Branding in Market Identity Consistency and Building Trust**

Visual branding plays a pivotal role in establishing a consistent foundation for market identity, complementing creative design (Putri & Yulianto, 2025; Dawami, 2025; Harahap & Nainggolan, 2025). Research consistently confirms that consumers exhibit a higher ability to recall brands with consistent visual appearances, encompassing logos, typography, and color schemes. This visual consistency fosters strong associations in consumers' minds, enhancing brand recognizability amidst the dense flow of digital information. In the content-saturated digital marketing landscape, the power of consistent visual branding is a determining factor in brand memorability versus obscurity. For MSMEs, visual branding not only strengthens recall but also symbolizes credibility and professionalism. Many consumers, particularly digitally native young people, tend to judge product or service quality based on a brand's visual presentation. A well-designed logo, appropriate color choices aligned with brand identity, and a consistent visual style across digital channels project an image of serious management and trustworthiness (Hakim, 2024). Consequently, visual branding transcends mere aesthetics, functioning as a potent communication instrument that influences consumer perceptions of brand quality and integrity. This visual consistency is crucial for addressing issues such as Palima Foods' inconsistent logo usage and the need to strengthen its brand identity to project greater professionalism and trustworthiness.

### **Synergy Between Creative Design and Visual Branding: A Differentiating Force**

The integration of creative design and visual branding generates a synergy that significantly strengthens MSME digital marketing strategies. Creative design serves as the primary catalyst for initial appeal, attracting consumer attention through novel, innovative, and visually relevant elements aligned with market trends. Meanwhile, visual branding ensures that the displayed message remains consistent, recognizable, and sustainable across diverse digital communication channels. This integrated approach cultivates a more complete consumer experience, where initial visual appeal is complemented by identity consistency that builds trust. This process is crucial, as consumers tend to embark on a brand journey extending beyond the awareness stage, fostering long-term loyalty (Budiarti, 2024). This synergy is not merely additive; it creates a multiplicative effect where a captivating design is amplified by consistent branding, and consistent branding gains impact through compelling creative execution. For example, the vibrant and authentic visual narrative of a local food MSME, powered by creative design in its packaging and social media content, when consistently applied across all touchpoints, can foster a deeper emotional connection

with consumers than either element would achieve in isolation. Such a unified approach is a key differentiator in a market often characterized by product homogeneity.

### **Visual Branding as a Strategy for Global Market Penetration and Value Creation**

Strong visual branding, underpinned by creative design, is a critical asset for MSMEs aiming to penetrate global markets (Fathonah et al., 2024). In the digital ecosystem, where consumers often lack direct physical access to assess product quality, initial evaluations are heavily based on visual representations. MSMEs with a consistent and professional visual identity are better positioned to build international credibility than those with inconsistent or simplistic branding. The challenge for MSMEs with limited resources is to maximize this potential through accessible digital design tools, strategic collaborations with designers, or internal training (Muliati, 2025). The integration of creative design and visual branding can also be viewed as a strategy capable of creating substantial value beyond increased sales, encompassing enhanced reputation, credibility, and market positioning. Amidst fierce competition and product homogeneity, innovative and consistent visual branding serves as a difficult-to-replicate differentiator.

### **Visual Implications on Quality Perception and Market Identity Reinforcement**

Literature findings indicate that an effective visual strategy, combining attractive creative design with consistent visual branding, significantly impacts product quality perception and reinforces MSME market identity. While MSMEs often prioritize product quality or competitive pricing due to limited resources, they frequently overlook that consumers' initial perceptions are heavily shaped by visual appearance (Nelsa, 2024). A well-executed visual strategy not only attracts new customers but also fosters lasting emotional connections, cultivating long-term loyalty (Chyntia et al., 2025; Firdaus et al., 2025). Market identity extends beyond product representation to encompass a brand's values, vision, and narrative. Visual narratives are the primary medium bridging brand values with consumer perceptions, enabling MSMEs to build deep emotional connections. For instance, sustainability-focused MSMEs can leverage eco-friendly packaging and green-themed visuals to signal social responsibility, aligning with growing consumer awareness. Similarly, culinary MSMEs can showcase local motifs or regional colors to emphasize authenticity and cultural heritage, creating an emotional advantage. Real-world examples, such as the artisanal coffee brand "Kopi Kenangan" in Indonesia, demonstrate how a strong visual identity from its distinctive logo and packaging to its consistent social media presence has been instrumental in building brand recognition and fostering a loyal customer base, allowing it to expand rapidly both domestically and internationally. Another example is the fashion MSME "Cottonink," which has successfully built a recognizable brand through its minimalist yet distinctive visual style, resonating with its target audience and fostering a sense of aspirational lifestyle. These examples highlight how a cohesive and strategically implemented visual identity can translate into tangible market success.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

This study concludes that the integration of creative design and visual branding is a crucial fundamental component in strengthening modern SMEs' digital marketing strategies, enabling them to optimize brand awareness and enhance market identity.

Creative design functions as a key differentiator that captivates consumers during initial interactions, while visual branding ensures long-term brand identity consistency, thereby building credibility and strengthening consumer recall. The synergy of these elements cultivates a holistic brand experience, significantly contributing to increased brand awareness, fortified market identity, and enhanced MSME competitiveness amidst intense digital competition. This research corroborates that a strong, consistent, and innovative visual identity is no longer merely a complement but a strategic factor determining consumer appeal, credibility, and loyalty. Thus, this research offers an integrative perspective that expands academic understanding and provides practical recommendations for MSMEs, advocating for the view of visual branding as a strategic investment rather than an additional aesthetic aspect, thereby enabling MSMEs to expand their market reach and foster sustainable consumer loyalty. The implications of this research are twofold: theoretical and practical. Theoretically, this study enriches digital marketing literature by highlighting the role of visual integration (creative design and visual branding) as a significant variable previously not comprehensively explored within the MSME context. This opens avenues for further research to develop conceptual and empirical models examining the nuanced relationship between visual innovation, brand consistency, and consumer loyalty (Setini et al., 2025).

Practically, the findings serve as a vital guide for MSMEs, including Palima Foods. For Palima Foods, the insights from this literature review suggest a clear path forward. The company needs to move beyond relying solely on its reseller network and actively leverage its brand. This involves developing a consistent and professional visual identity. Specifically, Palima Foods should: (1) Establish a clear and unified brand logo and color palette that accurately reflects the quality and taste of its dim sum, addressing the current logo inconsistency. (2) Redesign product packaging to visually communicate the superior quality of its products, moving away from generic presentations. (3) Enhance promotional photography and social media content with visually appealing and high-quality imagery that showcases the dim sum attractively. (4) Develop a consistent visual narrative across all digital platforms to build brand recognition and trust, which in turn can attract independent customers and potentially new resellers. By investing in creative design and consistent visual branding, Palima Foods can enhance its market visibility, attract a broader customer base, and ultimately drive sales growth beyond its current reliance on resellers. MSMEs must cultivate awareness that a professional and consistent visual identity across digital channels is key to increasing credibility, expanding market reach, and creating differentiation that is difficult for competitors to replicate (Hakim, 2024). Consequently, prioritizing collaboration with professional graphic designers, utilizing user-friendly digital design technology, or implementing internal training on the importance of visual strategies are crucial steps.

Producing visual representations that align with brand values is paramount. With the right integration strategy, MSMEs can achieve higher visibility amidst the dense digital information flow, build deep emotional bonds with consumers, and create a consistent brand experience, thereby fostering trust and long-term loyalty. These practical implications ultimately enhance MSME competitiveness in both local and global markets, strengthening their position against the evolving dynamics of the digital economy (Setini et al., 2025). In light of the findings and study limitations, several suggestions for future research are proposed. These include conducting empirical studies to quantitatively measure the specific impact of implementing creative design

and visual branding on key digital marketing metrics (e.g., brand awareness, engagement, sales, loyalty) through case studies of various MSMEs. Furthermore, there is a need to create a structured, practical framework or model for resource-constrained MSMEs to implement creative design and visual branding strategies effectively, potentially including guides, tools, or collaboration models. Future research should also investigate the adaptability of visual strategies across different industries and cultural contexts to provide broader insights through cross-sectoral and cross-cultural analysis. Finally, undertaking longitudinal research to track the long-term effects of visual branding investments on MSME growth and sustainability is essential.

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