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Packaging Design and Brand Visibility: Cultural Identity Effects Among Generation Z Consumers

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A B S T R A C T
This study examines the influence of packaging visual design elements (color, shape, typography, and logo placement) on brand visibility and purchase intention among Generation Z consumers in the Indonesian local beauty industry. Extending Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theory, this research introduces cultural identity as a moderating factor and integrates cultural branding into packaging design literature. A mixed-methods approach is proposed, involving expert interviews (n=15), focus groups with Gen Z consumers (n=60), and a survey analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (target n=400). The findings are expected to show that culturally integrated packaging designs enhance brand visibility and purchase intention, providing practical guidelines for Indonesian beauty brands to strengthen differentiation and consumer engagement.

INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian beauty market has experienced remarkable growth, reaching USD 7.5 billion in 2024, with local brands capturing an impressive 35% market share, driven primarily by Generation Z consumers (Euromonitor, 2024). This demographic shift represents a fundamental transformation in consumer behavior, as Gen Z consumers—born between 1997 and 2012—now constitute 27.94% of Indonesia's population and control significant purchasing power (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2024). However, despite this burgeoning market opportunity, 68% of local beauty brands fail within two years, primarily due to insufficient brand differentiation at the critical point-of-sale where up to 73% of purchase decisions are made (Polyakova, 2013; Indonesia Beauty Brands Association, 2024).

In this highly competitive landscape, packaging design has emerged as a crucial strategic tool—functioning as a "visual salesman" that must capture attention, communicate brand identity, and trigger purchase decisions within mere seconds of shelf exposure (Narayanan & Sharma, 2020; Srivastava et al., 2022). The visual elements of packaging—color, shape, typography, and logo placement—serve not merely as aesthetic choices but as potent psychological stimuli that shape consumer perceptions, emotional responses, and ultimately, purchase behaviors. Research demonstrates that these design elements can account for up to 85% of purchase motivation, with color alone influencing perception of brand personality, product quality, and emotional associations (Shen & Jung, 2024).

Research Gap and Motivation

Despite extensive research on packaging design effectiveness, three critical gaps remain inadequately addressed in extant literature. First, while numerous studies examine packaging elements in isolation (e.g., color psychology, shape symbolism), few investigate their synergistic effects within an integrated framework, particularly in emerging market contexts where local cultural values intersect with global aesthetic trends. Second, the moderating role of generational characteristics—specifically the unique preferences and values of Gen Z consumers—remains underexplored in packaging design research, despite this cohort's fundamentally different relationship with visual media and brand authenticity compared to previous generations. Third, and most critically, the literature lacks empirical examination of how cultural identity integration in packaging design influences brand visibility and purchase intention in markets where local brands compete against established global competitors.

These gaps are particularly consequential in Indonesia's beauty market context, where local brands must navigate a complex landscape of competing demands: (1) meeting Gen Z's preference for minimalist, sustainable, and "Instagram-able" aesthetics; (2) differentiating from global brands through cultural authenticity; and (3) achieving immediate visual impact in crowded retail environments. The theoretical tension between contemporary global aesthetic standards and culturally-specific visual language creates both challenges and opportunities for local beauty brands seeking sustainable competitive advantage.

Research Questions and Objectives

This study addresses these gaps by investigating the following research questions:

RQ1: How do visual packaging design elements (color, shape, typography, logo placement) individually and collectively influence brand visibility among Generation Z consumers in the Indonesian beauty market?

RQ2: What is the mediating role of brand visibility in the relationship between packaging design elements and purchase intention?

RQ3: How do cultural identity and Gen Z-specific preferences moderate the relationships between packaging design, brand visibility, and purchase intention?

The objectives of this research are threefold: (1) to develop and empirically validate an integrated theoretical framework linking packaging design elements to brand visibility and purchase intention; (2) to identify the specific design configurations that optimize brand visibility and purchase intention among Gen Z consumers; and (3) to explicate the boundary conditions (cultural identity, generational preferences) that strengthen or weaken these relationships. By addressing these objectives, this study contributes to both theoretical advancement and practical application in packaging design strategy for emerging markets.

Significance and Contribution

This research makes several important contributions. Theoretically, it extends Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theory by explicating the cognitive and emotional mechanisms through which packaging design elements influence consumer decision-making, while introducing cultural identity as a critical boundary condition. Methodologically, it employs a rigorous mixed-methods approach combining qualitative validation with quantitative hypothesis testing, addressing calls for more comprehensive research designs in packaging studies. Practically, it provides actionable design guidelines for local beauty brands seeking to enhance market competitiveness through strategic packaging optimization, potentially reducing the high failure rate of new brand launches. The cultural integration toolkit developed from this research offers practitioners concrete strategies for balancing global aesthetic standards with local cultural authenticity—a challenge faced by emerging market brands across diverse product categories.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Theoretical Framework: Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) Model

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model, originally proposed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974) and subsequently refined for consumer behavior contexts, provides the foundational theoretical lens for this research. The model posits that environmental stimuli (S) trigger internal cognitive and emotional states within the organism (O), which subsequently drive behavioral responses (R). In the packaging design context, visual elements serve as environmental stimuli that activate perceptual processing, emotional reactions, and memory

encoding—collectively constituting the organism state—which then manifests in approach or avoidance behaviors, including purchase intention.

DThe SOR framework offers several theoretical advantages for examining packaging effectiveness. First, it acknowledges the mediating role of psychological processes between stimulus exposure and behavioral outcome, avoiding the oversimplification of direct stimulus-response relationships. Second, it accommodates both cognitive (e.g., brand recognition, quality perception) and affective (e.g., emotional associations, aesthetic pleasure) organism states, recognizing the multidimensional nature of packaging responses. Third, the model permits integration of moderating variables—such as cultural identity and generational preferences—as factors that influence the strength or direction of stimulus-organism or organism-response relationships.
In our application, packaging design elements (color, shape, typography, logo placement) constitute the stimulus (S), brand visibility and associated perceptions represent the organism state (O), and purchase intention serves as the behavioral response (R). This framework guides both our conceptual model development and empirical investigation strategy, providing theoretical coherence to the examination of multiple design elements and their interactive effects.

Color Psychology in Packaging Design

Color represents the most rapidly processed visual element in packaging design, with neurophysiological research demonstrating that color perception occurs within 90 milliseconds of exposure—significantly faster than shape or textual information processing (Labrecque & Milne, 2012). The psychological impact of color operates through multiple mechanisms: biological pre-wiring (e.g., red signaling danger or excitement), learned associations (e.g., pink connoting femininity in Western cultures), and context-specific meanings (e.g., white symbolizing purity in beauty products).

Empirical evidence consistently demonstrates color's influence on brand perception and purchase behavior. Shen and Jung (2024) found that strategic color application in packaging design significantly enhances product recognition and recall, with the effect varying systematically across color hues and saturations. Warm colors (red, orange, yellow) tend to increase arousal and urgency perceptions, while cool colors (blue, green, purple) evoke calmness and trustworthiness (Labrecque et al., 2013). In the beauty product category specifically, pastel and earth-tone palettes have gained prominence among Gen Z consumers, aligning with preferences for naturalness and sustainability (Hasibuan & Nuraeni, 2023).

However, color psychology research exhibits significant cultural variation, with identical hues eliciting divergent associations across cultural contexts (Aslam, 2006). In Indonesian culture, specific color combinations carry cultural significance that may enhance or diminish packaging effectiveness. For instance, integration of traditional batik-inspired color palettes may trigger positive cultural associations while differentiating local brands from global competitors. This cultural dimension of color psychology necessitates investigation of moderating effects in our empirical model.

Shape and Structural Design Elements

Package shape operates through both functional and symbolic dimensions. Functionally, shape influences shelf presence, ergonomics, and product protection. Symbolically, shape communicates brand personality through form associations—angular shapes suggesting masculinity and power, while rounded shapes connote femininity and friendliness (Westerman et al., 2012). For beauty products, packaging shape also signals product quality and positioning, with glass containers and sophisticated geometric forms indicating premium positioning, whereas simpler shapes suggest accessibility (Zhang & Kim, 2013).

Recent research highlights the importance of shape distinctiveness in crowded retail environments. Unusual or innovative package shapes significantly increase visual attention and memory encoding, enhancing brand visibility (Underwood et al., 2001). However, excessive deviation from category norms may trigger uncertainty or schema incongruence, potentially reducing purchase intention (Meyers-Levy & Tybout, 1989). This suggests an inverted-U relationship between shape distinctiveness and effectiveness, with optimal differentiation occurring at moderate levels of deviation from category prototypes.

For Gen Z consumers specifically, package shape preferences intersect with sustainability concerns and aesthetic minimalism. Designs that minimize material usage while maintaining visual appeal resonate strongly with this demographic's environmental values (Hasibuan & Nuraeni, 2023). Additionally, "Instagram-ability"—the photogenic quality of packaging—has emerged as a salient criterion, with unique shapes facilitating social media sharing and user-generated content creation.

Typography and Textual Elements

Typography in packaging design serves dual functions: facilitating information transmission and communicating brand personality. Font selection, size, weight, and spacing collectively influence both legibility and aesthetic impression. Research demonstrates that font characteristics systematically affect product perception, with serif fonts connoting tradition and sophistication, while sans-serif fonts suggest modernity and approachability (Henderson et al., 2004). In beauty products, where brand story and ingredient information play crucial roles, typographic clarity becomes paramount for facilitating quick comprehension in retail contexts.

The legibility-aesthetics tradeoff presents a key design challenge. Highly decorative or script fonts may enhance visual appeal but impair information processing, potentially reducing purchase intention when product details matter to consumers (Tantillo et al., 1995). Conversely, strictly functional typography may facilitate comprehension but fail to differentiate brands or create emotional connections. Optimal typography likely varies across consumer segments, with Gen Z consumers potentially prioritizing clean, minimalist fonts consistent with their broader aesthetic preferences.

Cultural considerations in typography extend beyond language translation to encompass culturally-specific design conventions. In Indonesia, integration of traditional script elements or culturally-resonant font characteristics may enhance authenticity perceptions while differentiating local brands. However, such integration must be balanced against legibility requirements and contemporary aesthetic standards to avoid appearing outdated or limiting appeal to older demographics.

Logo Placement and Brand Identity Signaling

Logo placement on packaging constitutes a critical strategic decision influencing brand visibility and consumer processing. Tabassum (2019) demonstrated that logo position interacts with brand equity, with high-equity brands benefiting from elevated logo placement while lower-equity brands achieve better results from centered or lower positioning. This finding suggests that logo placement strategies should consider brand development stage and target positioning.

Recent research employing eye-tracking and deep learning methodologies provides insights into visual attention patterns. Hosseini et al. (2025) found that logo prominence—determined by size, position, and contrast with background—significantly predicts brand visibility and recall. Logos positioned in the upper third of packaging and occupying 15-25% of front panel area achieve optimal attention capture without overwhelming other design elements. However, these findings derive primarily from Western market contexts, necessitating validation in Indonesian settings where visual scanning patterns may differ.

Logo design complexity also influences effectiveness. While distinctive, memorable logos enhance brand recognition, excessive complexity can impair quick processing in low-involvement purchase situations typical of beauty product categories (Janiszewski & Meyvis, 2001). For emerging local brands lacking established awareness, logo prominence becomes particularly crucial for building initial recognition and differentiation from competitors.

Generation Z Consumer Characteristics and Preferences

Generation Z, encompassing individuals born approximately 1997-2012, exhibits distinct characteristics that differentiate their consumer behavior from previous cohorts. As digital natives who matured during smartphone ubiquity and social media proliferation, Gen Z demonstrates enhanced visual literacy, shortened attention spans, and heightened expectations for aesthetic quality and authenticity (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). In beauty product consumption specifically, this cohort prioritizes transparency, sustainability, and brands that align with personal values (McKinsey, 2023).

Research on Gen Z packaging preferences reveals several consistent patterns. First, minimalist design aesthetics featuring clean lines, ample white space, and restrained color palettes resonate strongly with this demographic (Hasibuan & Nuraeni, 2023). Second, sustainability indicators—recyclable materials, refillable containers, minimal packaging—significantly influence brand perception and purchase intention. Third, "shareability" or Instagram-ability of packaging emerges as a novel criterion, with visually distinctive

designs facilitating user-generated content creation and social media brand amplification.

Importantly, Gen Z consumers also exhibit strong cultural identity awareness and appreciation for locally-rooted brands, potentially creating opportunities for Indonesian beauty brands that successfully integrate cultural elements into contemporary design frameworks (Saito & Santoso, 2025). However, such integration must avoid kitsch or stereotypical representations that might trigger authenticity concerns or appear outdated to this sophisticated consumer segment.

Cultural Identity and Local Branding in Indonesia

Cultural identity integration in branding represents a strategic approach whereby brands incorporate culturally-significant symbols, narratives, or aesthetic elements to create emotional resonance and differentiation (Torelli et al., 2012). In Indonesia's multi-ethnic context, successful cultural integration requires sensitivity to regional diversity while identifying broadly-resonant national symbols or heritage elements. Brands such as Sariayu and Wardah have demonstrated the viability of cultural positioning, leveraging traditional ingredients, Islamic values, and local heritage themes to achieve market success (Nunung, 2025).

Cultural branding theory suggests that brands functioning as cultural artifacts derive competitive advantage through three mechanisms: (1) identity value—enabling consumers to express cultural affiliation and values; (2) authenticity—providing genuine connection to cultural heritage versus superficial appropriation; and (3) differentiation—standing apart from global competitors through local rootedness (Holt, 2004). In packaging design specifically, cultural integration might manifest through traditional motifs (e.g., batik patterns), color schemes reflecting cultural symbolism, typography incorporating indigenous script elements, or shape references to traditional objects.

However, cultural integration strategies face potential pitfalls. Excessive or stereotypical cultural symbolism may appear dated or kitsch, particularly to younger consumers balancing cultural pride with cosmopolitan aspirations. Conversely, subtle or abstract cultural references may fail to trigger recognition or emotional response. The optimal approach likely involves sophisticated integration that honors cultural heritage while maintaining contemporary aesthetic standards—a balance requiring careful empirical investigation.

Brand Visibility and Its Role in Purchase Decisions

Brand visibility—the ease with which consumers can identify and recognize a brand in competitive contexts—serves as a critical mediator between packaging design and purchase outcomes (Narayanan & Sharma, 2020). In retail environments where consumers make rapid selections among numerous alternatives, visibility determines whether brands enter consideration sets. Research indicates that increased brand visibility reduces cognitive effort required for brand identification, enhances accessibility in memory, and increases inclusion in purchase deliberation (Romaniuk & Sharp, 2004).

The relationship between design elements and visibility operates through attention capture and memory encoding. Eye-tracking studies demonstrate that distinctive visual elements—unusual colors, unique shapes, prominent logos—increase initial attention allocation and subsequent visual dwelling time (Pieters & Warlop, 1999). This enhanced attention facilitates memory encoding, improving later recognition and recall. Over repeated exposures, strong packaging designs build mental availability—the propensity for brands to be thought of in buying situations—which directly influences market share (Romaniuk & Sharp, 2016).

For emerging local brands competing against established players, visibility becomes particularly crucial. Without benefit of prior brand awareness or advertising exposure, packaging design must single-handedly achieve differentiation and recognition. This elevates the strategic importance of design optimization and suggests that visibility-purchase intention relationships may be especially strong for newer brands seeking market foothold.

Hypothesis

Each packaging design element contributes uniquely to brand visibility through specific psychological mechanisms. We develop separate hypotheses for each element before addressing their collective effects.

H1: Color congruence in packaging design positively influences brand visibility among Generation Z consumers in the Indonesian beauty market.

H2: Shape distinctiveness in packaging design positively influences brand visibility among Generation Z consumers in the Indonesian beauty market.

H3: Typography clarity in packaging design positively influences brand visibility among Generation Z consumers in the Indonesian beauty market.

H4: Logo prominence in packaging design positively influences brand visibility among Generation Z consumers in the Indonesian beauty market.

H5: Brand visibility positively influences purchase intention among Generation Z consumers in the Indonesian beauty market.

H6: Brand visibility mediates the relationships between packaging design elements (color congruence, shape distinctiveness, typography clarity, logo prominence) and purchase intention among Generation Z consumers in the Indonesian beauty market.

H7: Cultural identity salience moderates the relationship between brand visibility and purchase intention, such that the positive relationship is stronger among consumers with higher cultural identity salience.

H8: Gen Z aesthetic preferences moderate the relationships between packaging design elements and brand visibility, such that positive relationships are stronger among consumers with higher alignment with characteristic Gen Z aesthetic preferences.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design Overview

This study employs a sequential mixed-methods design combining qualitative and quantitative phases to ensure both theoretical richness and empirical rigor. Phase 1 (qualitative) validates the conceptual framework

through expert interviews and consumer focus groups, refining constructs and measurement approaches. Phase 2 (quantitative) tests hypotheses using structural equation modeling (SEM) with survey data from target consumers. This approach addresses limitations of purely conceptual or single-method studies while providing actionable insights for practitioners.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Expected Pattern of Results

Based on theoretical predictions and prior empirical evidence, we anticipate the following pattern of results:

Main Effects. All four packaging design elements (color congruence, shape distinctiveness, typography clarity, logo prominence) are expected to demonstrate significant positive relationships with brand visibility (supporting H1-H4). However, effect sizes may vary, with logo prominence and color congruence potentially showing stronger effects than typography clarity based on visual attention hierarchy principles. Brand visibility should demonstrate a strong positive relationship with purchase intention (supporting H5), consistent with established findings on the importance of brand recognition in purchase decisions.

Mediation. Brand visibility is expected to partially mediate relationships between design elements and purchase intention (supporting H6), indicating both direct and indirect pathways from packaging design to behavioral outcomes. The presence of partial rather than full mediation would suggest that design elements influence purchase intention both through enhanced visibility and through alternative mechanisms (e.g., direct emotional responses, quality inferences).

Moderation. Cultural identity salience is expected to moderate the visibility-intention relationship (supporting H7), with stronger effects among consumers exhibiting higher Indonesian cultural identification. This pattern would validate cultural branding theory's predictions about identity-based consumer responses. Gen Z aesthetic preferences should moderate design element-visibility relationships (supporting H8), with effects concentrated among consumers strongly aligned with characteristic Gen Z aesthetics. This finding would underscore within-generation heterogeneity and the importance of psychographic over demographic targeting.

Alternative Explanations and Competing Theories

Responsible scholarship requires consideration of alternative explanations for anticipated findings:

Involvement Effects. Alternative explanation: Observed packaging effects might primarily reflect low product involvement rather than design-specific mechanisms. In low-involvement purchases, consumers may rely heavily on peripheral cues including packaging aesthetics, with effects diminishing as involvement increases. This would suggest boundary conditions around our findings requiring explicit testing through involvement moderator analysis.

Social Desirability. Alternative explanation: Cultural identity moderation effects might reflect social desirability bias rather than genuine identity-based

preferences. Indonesian respondents may feel pressure to express positive responses toward culturally-integrated packaging regardless of actual preferences. This concern will be addressed through anonymity assurances, implicit measurement where feasible, and statistical controls for social desirability tendency.

Mere Exposure. Alternative explanation: Visibility-intention relationships might primarily reflect mere exposure effects rather than packaging-specific mechanisms. Familiar brands (high visibility) naturally elicit more positive responses regardless of how visibility was achieved. While our design addresses this concern through hypothetical brands without prior market exposure, residual exposure effects through visual similarity to known brands remain possible.

Implications for Theory Refinement

SOR Model Enhancement. If cultural identity and Gen Z preferences demonstrate significant moderation as predicted, SOR theory applications should routinely incorporate individual difference variables as boundary conditions rather than assuming universal stimulus-response patterns. This would represent important theoretical maturation from main-effects-only models toward more nuanced, contextualized frameworks.

Visibility Conceptualization. Depending on measurement model results, brand visibility may emerge as a multidimensional construct encompassing attention, recognition, recall, and accessibility components. If so, future research should examine whether different design elements differentially influence visibility dimensions, enabling more precise theoretical predictions.

Cultural Integration Mechanisms. Qualitative findings regarding successful cultural integration approaches will inform theoretical development of mechanisms underlying cultural branding effectiveness—whether primarily cognitive (identity-congruence), emotional (cultural pride), or social (in-group signaling). This mechanistic understanding would advance cultural branding theory beyond descriptive accounts toward process models.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research addresses critical gaps in packaging design literature by examining synergistic effects of multiple design elements, explicating mediating mechanisms through brand visibility, and identifying cultural identity and generational preferences as important boundary conditions. By employing rigorous mixed-methods empirical investigation in the Indonesian beauty market context, the study advances both theoretical understanding and practical application of packaging design principles. Expected contributions include SOR theory extension, cultural branding integration, Gen Z-specific framework development, and actionable guidelines for practitioners. While limitations constrain definitive conclusions, the comprehensive research design positions this study to make substantial contributions to packaging design knowledge and Indonesian beauty brand competitiveness. As local brands navigate increasingly competitive markets where differentiation proves elusive and consumer preferences evolve rapidly, evidence-based packaging strategies informed by

rigorous research become not merely advantageous but essential for sustainable success.

FUTURE STUDY

This research opens numerous avenues for future investigation:

Longitudinal Studies. Tracking brand visibility and purchase behavior over time would reveal dynamic processes including learning effects, wear-out, and competitive response impacts. Particularly valuable would be longitudinal tracking of new brand launches examining how packaging design influences market penetration trajectories.

Cross-Cultural Comparisons. Replicating this research in other Southeast Asian markets (Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines) would identify culturally-universal versus Indonesia-specific principles. Broader Asia-West comparisons would test Western-derived theories' cross-cultural robustness.

Competitive Context Effects. This research examines packaging in relative isolation, yet real retail environments present multiple competing packages simultaneously. Research examining packaging effectiveness in competitive shelf sets would provide more ecologically valid insights.

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