VISUAL REVIEW | Vol. 18, No. 7, 2026 | ISSN 2695-9631
International Visual Culture Review / Revista Internacional de Cultura Visual

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https://doi.org/10.62161/revvisual.v18.6493

# PERCEPTION OF VISUAL BRAND CONTENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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**KEYWORDS**

*Visual culture*
*Digital visuality*
*Visual content*
*Brand communication*
*Social media*
*University students*
*PLS-SEM*

**ABSTRACT**

*Social media has become a central arena for branded visual communication, shaping brand identity and positioning. This study examines how 385 university students from Lima Sur (Peru) evaluate branded visual content on digital platforms, focusing on perceived aesthetic coherence, visual quality, and perceived narrative authenticity. Using a quantitative explanatory design and partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), the results show that all three dimensions positively and significantly predict brand-related attitudinal responses, with perceived authenticity exerting the most substantial effect. These findings underscore the relevance of culturally resonant visual strategies for youth audiences in emerging urban contexts.*

RECIBIDO: 05/ 08 / 2026
ACEPTADO: 20/ 10 / 2026

## 1. Introduction

Over the last decade, digital social networks have established themselves as one of the main spaces for the production, circulation, and consumption of visual content in contemporary everyday life. In these environments, images have taken on an unprecedented central role as a form of communication, interaction, and meaning construction, progressively displacing lengthy textual formats and shaping new dynamics of attention, recognition, and symbolic value. The growing primacy of the visual not only transforms modes of social interaction but also reconfigures the processes by which individuals interpret, evaluate, and engage with the discourses circulating in the digital ecosystem (Hajli, 2014; Voramontri & Klieb, 2019).

This phenomenon is particularly visible in the field of brand communication, where visual strategies have become a fundamental resource for building identity, positioning, and differentiation in scenarios characterized by high stimulus saturation. In the context of constant competition for visibility, brands resort to digital aesthetics, brief visual narratives, and audiovisual formats aligned with platform logic to capture the attention of audiences exposed to continuous visual flows (Kim et al., 2015; Villarroel Ordenes et al., 2019; Chu, 2011). In this context, images no longer serve a purely informative function but take on a strategic role in generating symbolic and emotional value (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019; Bagozzi et al., 2001; Biswas, 2019).

From a cultural perspective, the images that circulate on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, or Facebook do not operate solely as aesthetic supports or promotional instruments, but as symbolic devices that articulate narratives, affections, and forms of social identification (Wang, 2017). These images participate in specific regimes of visuality, defined both by the algorithmic logic of the platforms that condition the visibility, circulation, and hierarchization of content, and by the cultural practices of the audiences that consume, reinterpret, and re-signify them. In this framework, visual brand communication is embedded in broader dynamics of meaning production, where the commercial, the cultural, and the affective are deeply interrelated (Shao, 2009; Davis et al., 2014).

University students are a particularly relevant group for analyzing these dynamics, given their extensive exposure to digital content and their active role as visual prosumers (Vallerand et al., 2003). They not only consume brand images, but also interact with them, share them, comment on them, and incorporate them into the construction of their digital identity (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Phua et al., 2017; Koh et al., 2003). In Latin American urban contexts, such as southern Lima, these practices take place in settings marked by simultaneous processes of accelerated digitization, cultural hybridization, and socioeconomic inequality, which shape a particular framework for the reception, evaluation, and appropriation of visual brand content (Laroche et al., 2013; Habibi et al., 2014).

In these contexts, global digital aesthetics coexist with local cultural references, giving rise to hybrid forms of visuality that shape how young people interpret brand messages. The perception of coherence, authenticity, and closeness thus takes on a central role, especially among audiences increasingly sensitive to visual discourses perceived as artificial or overly commercial. Understanding these perceptions is key to analyzing the construction of attitudinal responses to brands in youth digital environments (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Liu et al., 2018).

Despite the sustained growth of research on digital marketing and branding in social networks, much of this research has focused on instrumental approaches that aim to measure commercial outcomes, such as engagement, purchase intention, or brand recall. This emphasis has relegated the analysis of the cultural and visual dimensions of content, as well as the ways audiences interpret it through symbolic and affective frameworks. Furthermore, empirical research that integrates robust explanatory methodologies, such as structural equation modeling, with approaches from visual culture and communication remains limited, particularly in Latin American contexts (Li et al., 2020; Okoli, 2016; Villarroel Ordenes et al., 2019).

In response to this gap, this study aims to analyze the perceptions of university students in southern Lima regarding the visual brand content they create and disseminate on social media, with the goal of understanding how digital aesthetics, graphic elements, and visual narratives influence their attention, assessment, and attitudinal disposition toward the brand. To this end, a quantitative explanatory approach is adopted, using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), which allows for an integrated examination of the relationships between variables associated with perceived aesthetic coherence, visual quality, narrative authenticity, and attitudinal response (Hair et al., 2021).

From a theoretical perspective, this work seeks to contribute to the field of visual culture by sitting on social media as a culturally situated visual practice, traversed by symbolic and affective dynamics that exceed purely commercial logic. From an empirical perspective, the study offers data-based evidence that contributes to understanding the visual factors that influence the construction of symbolic and emotional value among youth audiences in emerging urban contexts, expanding the analysis of the intersection between visual culture and digital communication in the post-digital era.

Within this framework, hypotheses are formulated to empirically test the effect of these visual dimensions on attitudinal response.

### *1.1. Objective and hypotheses*

General objective. To analyze, through partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), the effect of perceived aesthetic coherence, visual quality, and narrative authenticity of brand visual content on social media on the attitudinal response toward the brand among university students in southern Lima.

Research hypotheses. In line with the conceptual framework of the study and the proposed structural model, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1. Perceived aesthetic coherence of brand visual content on social media positively and significantly influences attitudinal response toward the brand.

H2. Visual quality of brand visual content on social media positively and significantly influences attitudinal response toward the brand.

H3. Perceived narrative authenticity of brand visual content on social media positively and significantly influences attitudinal response toward the brand.

In line with these objectives and hypotheses, the theoretical framework develops the main conceptual contributions on visual culture, brand visual content, and visual narratives in digital environments, which underpin the proposed analytical model.

## 2. Theoretical framework

### *2.1. Visual culture and regimes of visuality in digital environments*

Visual culture has established itself as an interdisciplinary field that examines the role of images in the production of meaning, the construction of identities, and the configuration of social practices. From this perspective, visuality is not limited to the physiological act of seeing. Still, it involves a network of cultural conventions, technical devices, and interpretive frameworks that organize the visible in specific historical contexts. In contemporary digital environments, this visuality acquires characteristics associated with the speed of image circulation, its constant reproduction, and its insertion into communication flows mediated by technological platforms.

Social networks function as visual infrastructures that condition both the production and reception of images. Through algorithms that hierarchize content, these platforms establish regimes of visibility that influence which images circulate, how they are presented, and which audiences they reach. In this context, images do not operate neutrally, but actively participate in the construction of imaginaries, expectations, and forms of social recognition. Digital visual culture is thus configured as a space where economic interests, cultural practices, and mediation technologies converge (Hajli, 2014; Shao, 2009; Zhang et al., 2022).

The so-called post-digital condition intensifies these dynamics by blurring the boundaries between online and offline. The images produced and consumed on social media are organically integrated into everyday life, shaping how individuals interpret and relate to their environment. For younger generations, especially university students, these digital visualities constitute a common frame of reference from which meanings, preferences, and attitudes are constructed.

From this perspective, analyzing brand visual content on social media involves placing it within a specific visual regime, where the image becomes a symbolic device capable of articulating values, emotions, and narratives that exceed its promotional function.

### *2.2. Brand visual content and perceived aesthetic coherence*

Brand visual content can be understood as the set of images, graphic resources, and audiovisual pieces designed to communicate a brand's identity, values, and positioning in digital environments. On social media, this content takes on a strategic nature, as it must compete for attention in scenarios saturated with visual stimuli and respond to short and highly dynamic formats (Kim et al., 2015; Okoli, 2016).

One of the key elements in the perception of this content is perceived aesthetic coherence, understood as the visual coherence that manifests itself in the recurring use of colors, fonts, compositional styles, and graphic codes (Danaitis & Usovaitė, 2012; Lupton, 2010; Lewandowska & Olejnik-Krugly, 2021). Perceived aesthetic coherence contributes to brand recognition and facilitates the construction of stable visual universes, which is essential on platforms where exposure to content is fragmented and short-lived (Danaitis & Usovaitė, 2012; Lupton, 2010).

In the context of social media, visual coherence does not imply rigid uniformity, but rather the ability to maintain a recognizable identity across diverse content adapted to different formats. Brands that manage to articulate a coherent aesthetic tend to generate higher levels of familiarity and recall, thereby strengthening their symbolic presence in audiences' minds (Li & Lo, 2015; Kim & Lim, 2019; Zailskaitė-Jakštė, 2018).

From a visual culture perspective, perceived aesthetic coherence can be understood as a mechanism that regulates the user's visual experience, guiding their gaze and facilitating identification. Brand aesthetics are therefore not limited to an ornamental aspect but fulfill a central communicative function in the construction of meaning (Stone et al., 2004; Tanhofer, 2008; Krishna, 2012; Elder & Krishna, 2022).

### *2.3. Visual narratives, perceived authenticity, and attitudinal response*

Visual narratives on social media are characterized by their brevity, fragmentation, and focus on generating immediate impact. Through sequences of images, short videos, and vertical formats, brands construct visual stories that seek to connect emotionally with audiences and give meaning to their symbolic proposals (Villarroel Ordenes et al., 2019; Shareef et al., 2019).

In this context, perceived authenticity emerges as a fundamental dimension in evaluating brand visual content. Authenticity is not only about the veracity of the message, but also about the perception of coherence between what the brand communicates visually and the values it claims to represent. For young audiences, authenticity is often associated with closeness, transparency, and alignment with shared cultural experiences (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Liu et al., 2018; Wongkitrungrueng & Assarut, 2020).

Visual content perceived as overly artificial or purely commercial tends to elicit hostile or indifferent responses, whereas content that incorporates more human, contextually grounded visual narratives promote emotional engagement (Jakic et al., 2017). In this sense, authenticity serves as a symbolic mediator that directly influences attitudinal responses toward the brand (Harridge-March, 2006).

Attitudinal responses comprise cognitive and affective evaluations that translate into favorable or unfavorable predispositions (Sichtmann & Diamantopoulos, 2013; Zeithaml et al., 1996). In the field of visual communication, these responses are shaped by the interaction between aesthetic, narrative, and cultural factors, which justifies the use of integrated analytical models for their study (Ajzen, 1991; Bagozzi et al., 2001; Russell & Mehrabian, 1974).

From this perspective, the use of partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) enables an explanatory analysis of the relationships among perceived aesthetic coherence, narrative authenticity, and attitudinal response, offering a methodological approach that is consistent with the complexity of visual phenomena in digital environments (Hair et al., 2021).

## 3. Methodology

### *3.1. Research approach and design*

The study used a quantitative, explanatory approach to analyze the causal relationships among variables related to the perception of visual brand content on social media. A non-experimental, cross-sectional design was adopted, as the data were collected at a single point in time and without deliberate manipulation of the study variables.

This approach is relevant for examining complex communicative phenomena in digital environments, where visual perception, attitudinal responses, and symbolic processes can be modeled

using latent variables. In this sense, the study lies at the intersection between visual communication research and explanatory quantitative approaches, integrating a cultural reading of visuality with advanced statistical techniques (Hair et al., 2021).

### *3.2. Population, sample, and context of the study*

The population consisted of university students enrolled in higher education institutions located in southern Lima. This context was selected due to its emerging urban character, high social media penetration, and the relevance of young university students as active audiences in the circulation and consumption of digital visual content.

The sample consisted of 385 university students from southern Lima, aged between 18 and 27 (M = 21.4; SD = 2.3). Of the total number of participants, 58.2% were women and 41.8% were men. In relation to social media use, 94.6% reported intensive daily use, with Instagram (89.1%), TikTok (83.4%), and Facebook (76.8%) being the most widely used platforms. These data confirm a high level of exposure to and familiarity with digital visual communication environments, which are relevant to the study's objectives. The inclusion criteria were that participants be enrolled university students, residents of southern Lima, and active social media users.

Platform use was measured using a multiple-choice question (participants were allowed to select more than one social network), so the percentages are not mutually exclusive.

This sample size is adequate for the application of structural equation modeling using partial least squares, exceeding the minimums recommended for estimating models with multiple latent constructs (Hair et al., 2021).

From a cultural perspective, the context of southern Lima offers a relevant setting for analyzing how visual brand perceptions are shaped in environments undergoing rapid digitization, sociocultural diversity, and intensive exposure to visual platforms.

### *3.3. Data collection instrument*

Data collection was conducted using a structured questionnaire designed explicitly for the study. The instrument consisted of items formulated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) (Hair et al., 2021).

The variables analyzed were perceived aesthetic coherence, visual quality, narrative authenticity, and attitudinal response to the brand. The items were developed from specialized literature on visual communication, visual culture, and digital branding, and subsequently adapted to the context of social media (Danaitis & Usovaitė, 2012; Lupton, 2010).

The questionnaire items were developed and adjusted based on specialized literature and previous instruments on visual identity, brand content, and attitudinal responses in digital environments. The process consisted of semantic and contextual adaptation to the use of social media and the profile of university students, while maintaining the conceptual coherence of each construct. The references provided for each item correspond to its theoretical basis and related empirical studies.

To standardize responses, participants were asked to select a brand that they actively followed on social media and had seen in the last week. Responses were based on the evaluation of recent visual content published by that brand.

This strategy allowed for the evaluation of perceptions of visual content under realistic and habitual conditions of exposure for the participant. However, it is recognized that the heterogeneity of the brands evaluated may introduce uncontrolled variability, so that future research could standardize exposure using experimental stimuli or by selecting a limited set of brands.

### *3.4. Data analysis procedure and technique*

The data were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), using SmartPLS software (version 4). This technique is suitable for explanatory studies, especially when working with complex models, latent variables, and data distributions that are not necessarily normal (Hair et al., 2021).

The analysis was carried out in two stages. First, the measurement model was evaluated, examining the internal reliability and convergent and discriminant validity of the constructs. Second, the structural

model was analyzed to estimate the significance and magnitude of the relationships among the proposed variables.

To evaluate statistical significance, a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples was applied, following the methodological recommendations for this type of analysis (Hair et al., 2021).

Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and the confidentiality of the information was guaranteed in accordance with ethical research principles.

Although full HTMT ratios, collinearity diagnostics (VIF), and predictive relevance indicators ($Q^2$ and PLSpredict) are not reported in detail due to space constraints, all values met the recommended methodological thresholds; full SmartPLS outputs are available upon request.

## 4. Results

### *4.1. Evaluation of the measurement model*

The evaluation of the measurement model allowed us to verify the psychometric quality of the constructs included in the study. First, the factor loadings of the indicators were analyzed, and it was observed that they all exceeded the recommended minimum value of 0.70, indicating an adequate representation of the items with respect to their latent variables.

In terms of internal reliability, Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) exceeded the established thresholds, indicating internal coherence across all constructs. Likewise, the mean extracted variance (AVE) values exceeded 0.50, confirming the model's convergent validity (Hair et al., 2021).

Discriminate validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, which requires that the square root of each construct's AVE be greater than its correlations with the other constructs, indicating that each variable measures a different concept within the proposed model. Taken together, these results confirm that the measurement model has adequate levels of reliability and validity, allowing us to proceed to the analysis of the structural model (Hair et al., 2021).

Additionally, complementary diagnostics recommended for PLS-SEM were performed, including evaluation of discriminant validity using HTMT, assessment of collinearity using VIF, and assessment of predictive relevance using $Q^2$. The results were reviewed according to the usual methodological criteria reported in the literature, and the complete SmartPLS outputs are available upon request.

Table 1 presents the reliability and convergent validity indicators of the constructs included in the model.

**Table 1.** Reliability and convergent validity of constructs

| Construct | Cronbach's alpha | Composite reliability (CR) | AVE |
|---|---|---|---|
| Perceived aesthetic coherence | 0.88 | 0.91 | 0.67 |
| Visual quality | 0.84 | 0.89 | 0.62 |
| Narrative authenticity | 0.90 | 0.92 | 0.70 |
| Attitudinal response | 0.86 | 0.90 | 0.65 |

Source: Author, 2026.

The results presented in Table 1 show adequate levels of reliability and convergent validity in all constructs of the model. Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values exceed the recommended minimum thresholds, indicating satisfactory internal coherence of the scales used. Likewise, the mean extracted variance (AVE) values are above 0.50 in all cases, confirming that the constructs explain an adequate proportion of their indicators' variance. Taken together, these results support the psychometric quality of the measurement model and allow us to move forward with confidence to the analysis of the structural model.

### *4.2. Evaluation of the structural model*

The structural model analysis enabled us to examine the causal relationships among the study's latent variables. The coefficient of determination ($R^2$) for the dependent variable, attitudinal response to the brand, was moderate to high, indicating that a substantial proportion of its variance is explained by the predictor variables in the model.

The results of the trajectory analysis show that perceived aesthetic coherence, visual quality, and narrative authenticity have positive, statistically significant effects on attitudinal responses toward the brand.

Table 2 summarizes the trajectory coefficients and significance levels of the structural model.

**Table 2.** Structural model results

| Relationship | β | T | p |
|---|---|---|---|
| Perceived aesthetic coherence → Attitudinal response | 0.36 | 6.21 | p < 0.001 |
| Visual quality → Attitudinal response | 0.21 | 3.98 | p < 0.001 |
| Narrative authenticity → Attitudinal response | 0.41 | 7.14 | p < 0.001 |

$R^2$ (Attitudinal response) = 0.58

Source: Author, 2026.

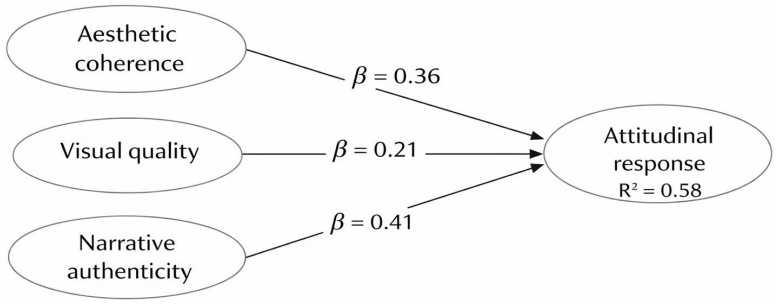
Table 2 presents the results of the structural model estimated using PLS-SEM. The path coefficients indicate that perceived aesthetic coherence, visual quality, and narrative authenticity have positive, statistically significant effects on the attitudinal response toward the brand. Among these variables, narrative authenticity has the most significant explanatory power, followed by perceived aesthetic coherence, while visual quality, although substantial, has a smaller effect. The coefficient of determination ($R^2$ = 0.58) indicates a moderate-to-high explanatory level, suggesting that the model adequately captures the central factors that influence the visual perception of the brand among university students.

Overall, the results support the three hypotheses proposed (H1–H3), confirming positive and statistically significant effects of perceived aesthetic coherence, visual quality, and narrative authenticity on attitudinal response toward the brand.

These findings suggest that, for university students, the assessment of brand visual content does not depend solely on formal or technical aspects, but also on the perception of symbolic coherence and authenticity in the visual narratives disseminated on social media.

Figure 1 shows the structural model estimated using PLS-SEM and summarizes the standardized coefficients (β) and the level of explained variance ($R^2$) of the dependent variable.

**Figure 1.** Estimated structural model (PLS-SEM) of the perception of brand visual content




*Note. Standardized coefficients (β). Dependent variable: attitudinal response ($R^2$ = 0.58).*

Source: Author, 2026.

Figure 1 summarizes the structural model and provides an integrated view of the contribution of the three visual dimensions to the attitudinal response toward the brand. The model has moderate-to-high explanatory power ($R^2$ = 0.58), indicating that perceived aesthetic coherence, visual quality, and narrative authenticity account for a substantial proportion of the variation in attitudes. In comparative terms, narrative authenticity exhibits the most significant effect (β = 0.41), followed by perceived aesthetic coherence (β = 0.36), while visual quality maintains a positive impact, but of lesser magnitude (β = 0.21). Overall, the pattern suggests that student evaluation is based not only on formal criteria, but also on the credibility and symbolic coherence of the brand's visual discourse.

### *4.3. Summary of results*

In general terms, the results show that a complex interaction among aesthetic, narrative, and attitudinal dimensions shapes perceptions of brand visual content on social media.

Visual coherence contributes to brand recognition and symbolic stability, while narrative authenticity strengthens emotional involvement and favorable predisposition toward the brand. Overall, the findings indicate that brand visual content operates as a symbolic mediator in the

relationship between brands and young audiences, in a context where digital visuality occupies a central place in everyday experience.

### *4.4. General interpretation of the structural model*

The structural model estimated using PLS-SEM provides an integrated view of the relationships among the variables, offering a comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence attitudinal responses toward the brand in social media environments. The value obtained from the coefficient of determination ($R^2$) indicates a moderate-to-high explanatory level, suggesting that the dimensions included in the model adequately capture the central elements of visual brand perception among university students.

The distribution of the trajectory coefficients reveals significant differences in the explanatory weights of the predictor variables. Narrative authenticity has the most significant impact on attitudinal responses, indicating that visual narratives perceived as coherent and genuine play a central role in the construction of symbolic value. This result highlights that university students do not respond solely to attractive visual stimuli but instead value the coherence between the brand's visual discourse and the meanings it projects.

Perceived aesthetic coherence also shows a significant effect, confirming its importance in brand recognition and symbolic stability. Visual coherence facilitates identification in environments with highly fragmented content, thereby reinforcing familiarity and recall. In this sense, perceived aesthetic coherence serves as a structuring element of the visual experience, contributing to a clearer, more orderly perception of the brand universe.

For its part, visual quality, although significant, has less explanatory weight. This result suggests that the technical excellence of visual content is a necessary condition for its acceptance, but not sufficient to generate a favorable attitudinal response. Visual quality becomes more relevant when integrated into a coherent aesthetic proposal and a narrative perceived as authentic, reinforcing the relational and symbolic nature of visual brand communication (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019).

Overall, the model confirms the relevance of analyzing the perception of brand visual content from a multidimensional approach, integrating aesthetic, narrative, and attitudinal factors into a coherent explanatory framework.

## 5. Discussion

The results obtained provide a deeper understanding of brand visual content as communicative practices are situated within contemporary regimes of digital visuality. In line with the objectives of the study, the findings show that the perception of this content among university students is shaped by a complex interaction between aesthetic, narrative, and symbolic dimensions, beyond purely technical or functional criteria (Shao, 2009; Hajli, 2014).

Perceived aesthetic coherence is confirmed as a relevant factor in attitudinal responses to brands, which coincides with approaches that emphasize the role of visual coherence in building recognition and familiarity. In digital environments characterized by fragmentation and overexposure to visual stimuli, perceived aesthetic coherence serves as a stabilizing element, facilitating brand identification amid the constant flow of images. From a visual culture perspective, this coherence contributes to the construction of recognizable visual universes that sustain attention and promote visual memory processes (Danaitis & Usovaitė, 2012; Lupton, 2010; Li & Lo, 2015).

Narrative authenticity emerges as the variable with the most significant explanatory weight, reinforcing the idea that young audiences not only evaluate the visual form of content but also its symbolic coherence and alignment with values perceived as genuine. This finding is consistent with studies that point to a growing sensitivity among young people to visual discourses perceived as artificial or excessively commercially oriented. In this sense, authenticity serves as a cultural mediator, connecting brand narratives with shared social experiences and strengthening affective involvement (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Liu et al., 2018).

Visual quality, while maintaining a significant relationship with attitudinal response, has lesser effects compared to perceived aesthetic coherence and narrative authenticity. This result allows us to qualify approaches focused exclusively on technical excellence, suggesting that visual quality is a necessary but not sufficient condition for generating symbolic value. Technique becomes relevant when it is coherently integrated into an aesthetic and narrative proposal that is meaningful to audiences.

From a contextual perspective, the results take on special relevance when situated in an emerging urban environment such as southern Lima. In this context, digital visual practices develop in settings marked by processes of cultural hybridization, the circulation of global references, and local appropriations. Brands that manage to articulate visual strategies sensitive to these cultural dynamics tend to generate higher levels of identification and appreciation among university students, reinforcing the importance of culturally situated visual approaches (Laroche et al., 2013; Habibi et al., 2014; Santos et al., 2021).

Taken together, the findings confirm that brand visual content operates as complex symbolic devices, whose communicative effectiveness depends on their ability to integrate into the visual regimes of social media and the cultural practices of young audiences. This reading allows us to shift the analysis of brand communication from an instrumental logic to a broader understanding of its cultural and visual dimensions.

### *5.1. Theoretical and practical implications*

From a theoretical perspective, this study's results contribute to the fields of visual culture and digital communication by showing that branded visual content on social media operates as complex symbolic devices whose effectiveness cannot be explained solely by technical or formal criteria. The empirical confirmation of the central role of perceived aesthetic coherence and, especially, narrative authenticity reinforces approaches that conceive digital visuality as a situated cultural practice, traversed by processes of signification, identification, and affectivity. In this sense, the study expands the existing literature by integrating aesthetic and narrative variables into an explanatory model based on PLS-SEM, providing quantitative evidence to debates traditionally approached from qualitative perspectives in visual culture.

Likewise, the research contributes to shifting the analysis of brand communication on social media from a predominantly instrumental logic to a broader understanding of its symbolic dimension. By situating the study in a Latin American urban context, it provides a contextualized view that engages with sociocultural realities that have been underrepresented in previous research, which has focused chiefly on contexts in the global north. This reinforces the need to consider local regimes of visuality in the analysis of visual brand discourses.

From a practical perspective, the findings offer relevant implications for the design of visual communication strategies aimed at youth audiences. The results suggest that brands should prioritize the construction of coherent visual aesthetics and narratives perceived as authentic, beyond the mere technical optimization of content. Visual quality, although necessary, is insufficient if it is not integrated into a symbolically consistent and culturally relevant narrative. In this sense, visual strategies that articulate shared values, experiences, and cultural references are more likely to elicit favorable attitudinal responses and sustained emotional bonds among university students (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019; Habibi et al., 2014; Jibril et al., 2019).

### *5.2. Limitations and future lines of research*

Despite its contributions, the study has some limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. First, the cross-sectional design of the research prevents long-term causal conclusions from being drawn, as perceptions and attitudinal responses were measured at a single point in time. Future research could adopt longitudinal designs to analyze the evolution of these perceptions and the stability of the effects observed over time.

Second, the use of non-probability convenience sampling limits the generalizability of the results to other population contexts. Although the sample size is adequate for the application of PLS-SEM, it would be pertinent to replicate the study in different age groups, geographic regions, or sociocultural contexts to test the robustness of the proposed model and explore possible variations in the perception of visual brand content.

Furthermore, the study focused on a specific set of variables associated with perceived aesthetic coherence, visual quality, and narrative authenticity. Future work could incorporate additional dimensions, such as the role of visibility algorithms, user participation in content co-creation, and the impact of emerging formats such as augmented reality and interactive video. Similarly, mixed methodological approaches that integrate qualitative techniques would allow for a deeper

understanding of the symbolic interpretation of images and the meanings that students attribute to visual brand discourses.

Together, these future lines of research would broaden and deepen the analysis of brand visuality on social media, strengthening the dialogue among visual culture, digital communication, and empirical studies in contemporary contexts.

## 6. Conclusions

This study analyzed perceptions of brand visual content on social media among university students, integrating a visual culture perspective with an explanatory quantitative methodological approach. The results obtained allow us to draw relevant conclusions that contribute to both the theoretical field and the empirical analysis of visual communication in digital environments.

First, it confirms that attitudinal responses to brands are significantly influenced by the perceived aesthetic coherence, narrative authenticity, and visual quality of the content disseminated on social media. Among these dimensions, narrative authenticity and perceived aesthetic coherence have the most significant impact, underscoring the importance of considering visual brand communication as a situated symbolic practice rather than solely a promotional function.

From a theoretical contribution, the study contributes to the field of visual culture by showing that brand images on social media not only convey commercial messages but also actively participate in the construction of meanings, affections, and forms of social identification. By situating the analysis in a Latin American urban context, the research broadens the scope of existing literature, which is predominantly focused on realities in the global north. It reinforces the need for contextual approaches in the study of digital visuality.

In methodological terms, the use of partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) demonstrates its usefulness in analyzing complex communicative phenomena, integrating aesthetic, narrative, and attitudinal variables into a coherent explanatory model. This approach contributes to strengthening the dialogue between quantitative methodologies and approaches from visual culture and visual communication.

From an applied perspective, the results suggest that visual brand communication strategies aimed at young audiences should prioritize perceived aesthetic coherence and narrative authenticity, adapting to the formats and dynamics of social media. Designing culturally relevant and symbolically coherent visual content is a key factor in generating emotional value and strengthening the relationship between brands and young university students.

Among the limitations of the study are its cross-sectional design and non-probabilistic sampling, which limit the generalizability of the results. Future studies could delve deeper into these dynamics through longitudinal, comparative, or qualitative designs. They could also explore other sociocultural contexts and digital platforms to broaden their understanding of visual brand perception.

In summary, this research contributes to a more complex understanding of the intersection between visual culture and brand communication in the post-digital era, highlighting the central role of visuality in the construction of symbolic and emotional value in contemporary social media.

Finally, the study reaffirms the need to approach visual brand communication from integrative approaches that recognize the symbolic complexity of images in contemporary digital environments. In a post-digital scenario marked by visual saturation and accelerated media consumption, understanding how young audiences interpret, value, and re-signify visual brand discourses is fundamental to developing culturally sensitive and socially relevant communication strategies.

## 7. Acknowledgments

The author thanks the university students who voluntarily participated in the data collection process and shared their time and perspectives by responding to the research instrument. The author also acknowledges the academic support received during the development of the study, which made possible the analysis and systematization of the results.

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# Appendix 1. Items of the instrument and theoretical sources

| Construct | Code | Item wording (summarized) | Theoretical basis/supporting reference |
|---|---|---|---|
| Perceived aesthetic coherence | PAC1 | The brand's visual content maintains a coherent aesthetic | Danaitis & Usovaitė (2012); Lupton (2010) |
| Perceived aesthetic coherence | PAC2 | There is coherence in the use of colors and fonts | Danaitis & Usovaitė (2012) |
| Perceived aesthetic coherence | PAC3 | The brand's visual identity is easily recognizable | Kim et al. (2015) |
| Visual quality | VQ1 | The visual content is of high technical quality | Kim et al. (2015) |
| Visual quality | VQ2 | The images and videos are well-produced | Villarroel Ordenes et al. (2019) |
| Visual quality | VQ3 | The visual content is visually appealing | Biswas (2019) |
| Narrative authenticity | NA1 | The brand is perceived as genuine in its visual content | Lou & Yuan (2019) |
| Narrative authenticity | NA2 | The visual content reflects authentic values | Liu et al. (2018) |
| Narrative authenticity | NA3 | Visual narrative conveys closeness and transparency | Wongkitrungrueng & Assarut (2020) |
| Attitudinal response | AR1 | I have a favorable attitude toward the brand | Ajzen (1991) |
| Attitudinal response | AR2 | I feel positively predisposed toward the brand | Bagozzi et al. (2001) |
| Attitudinal response | AR3 | The brand gives me a positive impression | Russell & Mehrabian (1974) |

*Note:* The items were developed/adapted by the author based on previous literature; the references indicated correspond to the conceptual basis and related empirical background.