



Visual Branding, Lifestyle Positioning, and Consumer Perception: How Instagram Shapes the Brand Image of an Urban Coffee Shop

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Abstract. This study examines how Instagram contributes to the formation of brand image through visual branding, lifestyle positioning, and consumer perception in the case of The Tables, an urban coffee shop in Jakarta. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research explores branding communication activities conducted through the Instagram account @thetables.jkt. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with internal stakeholders and consumers, non-participant observation of Instagram content, and digital documentation. The data were analysed using thematic analysis supported by NVivo to identify patterns related to visual branding, brand identity, lifestyle positioning, engagement, and consumer perception. The findings reveal that Instagram functions not merely as a promotional platform but as a symbolic space where brand identity and consumer experiences are continuously constructed. The Tables successfully differentiates itself through a consistent visual identity characterized by R&B culture, zebra symbolism, event-oriented content, and a distinctive ambiance. Consumers perceive the brand as more than a coffee shop, associating it with music, community, self-expression, and urban lifestyle experiences. The study also finds that while lifestyle-based branding effectively strengthens brand image and trust, it should be balanced with clearer product-related communication. Ultimately, brand image is shaped by the interplay among visual consistency, digital engagement, lifestyle positioning, and consumers' lived experiences.

Keywords: Brand Image; Consumer Perception; Instagram Marketing; Lifestyle Positioning; Visual Branding.

1. INTRODUCTION

For the urban coffee shop industry, Instagram serves not only as a promotional channel but also as a symbolic space where brand identity, place atmosphere, consumer lifestyle, and visual imagery are continuously constructed. In this regard, social media cannot be understood simply as an information distribution tool but rather as a complex brand communication strategy (Li et al., 2021). Digital consumers not only receive messages but also interpret, respond to, share, and even co-construct brand meaning through comments, reposts, reviews, and visual experiences. The future of digital marketing is largely determined by brands' ability to manage social interactions, behavioural data, and consumer experiences across various platforms (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Thus, Instagram has become a strategic space because it brings together visual communication, engagement, and brand perception.

Visual branding is a crucial aspect in this context. Consistency in colour, photo style, typography, symbols, visual tone, and content layout can strengthen brand recognition and shape consumers' initial impressions (Kaur & Kaur, 2021). Meanwhile, brand identity visualization in social media video content needs to be tailored to the messaging strategy, platform characteristics, and audience segment, particularly the younger generation (Hwang &

Lee, 2025). In other words, visual branding is not simply a matter of aesthetics, but a communication process that conveys a brand's values, personality, and positioning.

In the coffee shop industry, visual branding is becoming increasingly important because consumers are not just buying coffee but also an experience, atmosphere, and a sense of meaning. Urban coffee shops often function as social spaces, spaces for self-expression, informal workspaces, and places to build a social identity. In this context, lifestyle positioning is a crucial strategy for differentiating one coffee shop from another. Brands need more than just displaying menus or prices; they must communicate a specific lifestyle that consumers can associate with, influencing consumer purchasing decisions through brand trust (Hanaysha, 2022). Social media marketing and brand image play a crucial role in driving purchase intention in the coffee shop context (Armawan et al., 2023). This shows that brand image in the culinary business is built not only through product quality but also through digital experiences, services, e-WOM, and visual perception.

Instagram has the advantage of connecting the visual and interactive dimensions (Rahman et al., 2022). Meanwhile, social media marketing activities have a significant relationship with brand loyalty (Ibrahim, 2022). Social media marketing can influence brand trust, brand equity, and brand loyalty (Haudi et al., 2022). This shows that consumer perceptions are not formed spontaneously but through the accumulation of consistent visual exposure, interaction, trust, and experience.

Brand image itself can be understood as a collection of associations that arise in consumers' minds when they see, hear, or experience a brand. On Instagram, these associations are built through feed posts, reels, stories, captions, comments, customer reposts, and admin responses. Furthermore, social media marketing and brand image play a role in shaping purchase intention (Savitri et al., 2022). Furthermore, social media marketing activities can contribute to brand equity by fostering brand love and trust (Hafez, 2021). Furthermore, firm-generated social media content can influence customer-based brand equity in the retail industry (Al-Abdallah et al., 2025).

A recent study in Indonesia also reinforces the importance of Instagram as a brand communication medium. Fatah & Sidharta (2026) found that Instagram-based marketing communications can influence consumer choices through the mediating role of brand image. This means that social media can shape audience judgments, beliefs, and preferences (Septiani et al., 2026). Meanwhile, Rendi et al. (2026) used the Stimulus-Organism-Response model to argue that media stimuli can influence the audience's internal processes before eliciting a specific response. Although the contexts of these three studies differ, they are all relevant in

explaining the interconnectedness of media content, audience perceptions, and behavioural decisions.

Based on this description, by using the case of The Tables, an urban coffee shop that utilizes Instagram to build its brand image, this study aims to demonstrate how social media functions not only as a promotional channel but also as an arena for the formation of identity, experience, and brand image.

This study contributes to the literature by examining how lifestyle-oriented visual branding on Instagram shapes consumer perceptions and brand image within the context of an urban coffee shop characterized by a music-based community culture. Unlike previous studies that primarily focus on social media marketing effectiveness or purchase intention, this research highlights the role of visual identity, lifestyle positioning, and symbolic community culture in shaping brand image through digital platforms.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Visual branding is the process of communicating a brand through consistent visual elements, such as colour, symbols, typography, photography, content design, and message presentation style. In social media, visual branding is becoming increasingly important because audiences often form initial impressions of a brand through visuals before experiencing the product directly. Instagram visual content influences purchase intention by helping consumers understand product information, the atmosphere, and the brand's value (Izzati et al., 2024). In the context of a coffee shop, visuals not only showcase the coffee or menu but also convey the place's atmosphere, the community's character, and the lifestyle associated with the brand.

Instagram, as a visual medium, has characteristics that differ from those of conventional marketing media. User perceptions of social media ads can influence ad value, brand awareness, and brand associations, especially among younger Instagram users (Efendioglu & Durmaz, 2022). This suggests that audiences evaluate messages not only on the information provided but also on their appeal, relevance, and suitability to their symbolic needs. Social media marketing also plays a role in shaping brand experiences. On the other hand, social media marketing activities can influence brand loyalty through the mediation of brand experience (Kumar & Hsieh, 2024). This means that social media is not only a promotional channel, but also a space where consumers experience brands digitally. This experience emerges from content, interactions, admin responses, customer stories, and the consistency of the visual identity.

Brand experience in online social networks also has a unique dimension. Brand experience on social networks is shaped by consumer interactions with content, communities, and brand activities in the digital space (Yu et al., 2021). This experience can create psychological, emotional, and social engagement. Thus, when consumers see posts about the atmosphere, music, events, interior design, or visitor activities, they not only receive information but also form an image of the type of experience they will have when visiting the coffee shop.

The concept of lifestyle positioning is important because urban coffee shops not only sell beverages but also offer a social identity (Waworuntu et al., 2022). In the coffee shop context, lifestyle-based positioning can be built through narratives about hangouts, music, fashion, community, comfort, and visual aesthetics. Brands that can build this kind of positioning are more likely to be perceived differently from competitors. Brand image results from the accumulation of associations in consumers' minds (Tauran et al., 2022). This shows that social media strategies do not always directly drive purchasing decisions; rather, they first shape consumers' perceptions of the brand. In other words, Instagram can influence consumer perceptions of a brand's quality, uniqueness, and relevance.

In the coffee shop industry, trust and loyalty are also closely related to digital perception. Ramadhani and Ariyanti (2024) in their study of Fore Coffee showed that social media marketing can influence brand trust, brand image, and brand loyalty. This finding is important because modern coffee shops operate in a competitive digital ecosystem. Consumers can compare various coffee shop options through Instagram displays, reviews, comments, and brand responses. Therefore, brand image is formed not only by product quality but also by the credibility of consistently displayed digital communications.

Social interactions on digital media also strengthen brand image formation (Hasan et al., 2022). In this context, consumers are not only communication targets but also actors who contribute to the brand's meaning through comments, reposts, reviews, and event participation. Coffee shops that successfully manage these interactions can create an authentic impression by appearing vibrant, responsive, and connected to their community.

Furthermore, the quality of information and e-WOM also contribute to the formation of consumer perceptions (Wandoko & Panggati, 2022). In the context of Instagram coffee shops, customer comments, story reposts, visual testimonials, and admin interactions can strengthen the perception of brand trustworthiness. Consumers assess not only what the brand says but also how other customers describe their experiences. Meanwhile, customer behavior can result from social media marketing activities and customer experience (Wibowo et al., 2021). These

findings reinforce the assumption that consumers' decisions to visit, try products, or return to a coffee shop are inextricably linked to their previous digital experiences. Social media marketing activities impact brand love, brand awareness, and loyalty, meaning an emotional connection between consumers and brands can be built through consistent digital communication (Al-Hujri et al., 2025).

3. METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. The case study design was chosen because the research focuses on a specific case: The Tables Coffee Shop and the Instagram account @thetables.jkt, which serves as a digital communication platform for brand image development (Priya, 2021). The unit of analysis in this study is the branding communication activities of The Tables on Instagram, including visual content such as product photos, feed design, reels, stories, captions, visual symbols, colour tones, and interaction patterns between the brand and its audience. Furthermore, this study also examines consumer perceptions of The Tables' brand image as an urban coffee shop that combines elements of coffee, music, R&B, lifestyle, atmosphere, and social experiences.

Research informants were purposively selected: internal The Tables staff who understand branding strategy, as well as consumers or Instagram followers who have experience interacting with the account and/or visiting the coffee shop. Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, non-participant observation of the Instagram account, and documentation of digital content. Observations focused on visual consistency, content themes, use of Instagram features, message delivery, and engagement through comments, stories, reposts, likes, and audience responses to uploaded content.

This study used NVivo to manage and organize qualitative data. Transcribed interview data were entered into NVivo to aid the coding process based on key research issues, such as visual branding, lifestyle positioning, brand identity, brand image, engagement, and consumer perception. Instagram observation data, including visual notes and screenshot documentation, was also categorized in NVivo based on content type, visual message, symbol, colour tone, caption, and interaction type (Bingham, 2023). Therefore, NVivo was not used to replace researcher analysis, but rather as a tool to organize, explore, and compare data more systematically.

The analysis phase began with repeated reading of all transcripts and observation notes, creating initial codes, grouping codes into themes, reviewing the themes' alignment with the data, naming the themes, and developing final interpretations (Braun & Clarke, 2023). The

coding results in NVivo were then used to examine the relationship between The Tables' visual communication strategy on Instagram and audience perceptions of the resulting brand image. Data validity was maintained through triangulation of sources and techniques, comparing the results of internal interviews, consumer interviews, Instagram observations, and digital content documentation.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The NVivo word cloud results show that the most prominent words are The Tables, coffee shop, music, Instagram, branding, ambiance, and R&B. The dominance of these words indicates that The Tables' brand image is not solely cantered on coffee products, but also on the atmospheric and lifestyle experiences communicated through Instagram. Supporting words such as design, identity, character, community, events, customers, visuals, lifestyle, hangout, service, and trust demonstrate the relationships among visual identity, social activities, customer experience, and perceived brand trust.



Figure 1. Word Cloud The Tables.

The word cloud findings show that the words 'ambiance' and 'music' emerged as strong markers of The Tables' image. This is consistent with the owner's narrative, which positions The Tables as a meeting place for coffee, music, and lifestyle. In interviews, the owner did not position coffee as the sole core of the business, but rather as an entry point to a broader social and cultural experience.

"The concept that The Tables wants to present to consumers is more musical, embracing idealistic music, especially R&B... because we're talking about music and coffee... where music and coffee are intertwined" (Sunan, owner of The Tables).

This quote demonstrates that The Tables' branding strategy works through the integration of product, music, fashion, and atmosphere. Thus, The Tables' brand image is not built solely through explicit messaging, but through symbolic associations: R&B, zebras, community, late-night ambiance, and urban youth style. The same is evident in consumer

perceptions. Caciy, for example, said that when she first saw The Tables' Instagram, she felt like she was looking at a music collective's social media feed, not a typical coffee shop account.

"When I first saw the design of the feed, it felt like I wasn't looking at a coffee shop's IG feed anymore, but rather like I was looking at a music collective's social media" (Caciy, consumer).

This quote demonstrates that The Tables' visual message has successfully shifted consumer perception from the typical coffee shop category to a music- and community-based coffee shop. In other words, Instagram serves as a space for encoding brand identity, while consumers decode it as unique, different, and distinctive.

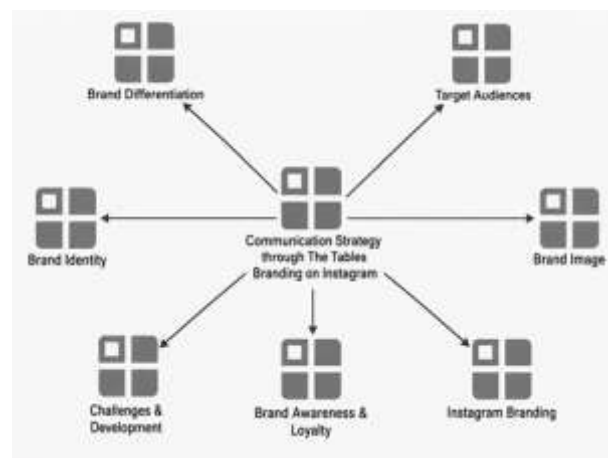


Figure 2. Case Classification of The Tables Branding Communication Strategy.

Figure 2 shows the results of the case classification that groups The Tables' branding communication strategies into seven main categories: Instagram branding, brand identity, brand differentiation, target audiences, brand image, brand awareness and loyalty, and challenges and development. These seven categories demonstrate that brand image formation is not the result of a single factor, but rather the outcome of the relationship among the brand's identity, the media used, the lifestyle positioned, and the perception consumers form.

The Tables understands Instagram as a primary branding medium. The owners consider Instagram not just a social media platform, but a visual portfolio that showcases the brand's selling points to the public. In brand communication, this demonstrates that Instagram serves as an identity showcase, containing visual messages, atmosphere, customer activities, events, and the lifestyle they want to associate with The Tables.

"The Tables' main purpose for using Instagram is as a branding medium, a portfolio, or a way to showcase The Tables' selling points to the public in general," (Sunan, owner of The Tables).

This statement demonstrates that Instagram is not merely a medium for disseminating information but also for establishing symbolic value. The Instagram account **@thetables.jkt** serves as a space where consumers learn about The Tables' character before visiting. This is evident in Alif's experience: he first learned about The Tables through Instagram Explore, where he frequently viewed content from coffee shops and hangouts in Jakarta.

"I first learned about The Tables through Instagram. It appeared on my Explore page because I often saw content about coffee shops and hangouts in Jakarta. Instagram became my primary source of information before deciding to visit, especially to check out the atmosphere" (Alif, consumer).

From a consumer perspective, Instagram has become the starting point for brand recognition. Consumers no longer wait for direct experience to form initial perceptions; they construct expectations through visual content, interior design, captions, colour tones, comments, and stories. This demonstrates that Instagram functions as a pre-experience platform, a space for initial experiences before consumers physically experience a coffee shop. The Tables' visual branding is built through consistent feed design, use of visual tone, zebra symbols, event posters, and an R&B feel. Interviews show that consumers recognize The Tables for its distinct visual character compared to other coffee shops.

"In terms of feeds, there are more event posters, but they're cool, because they're rare, especially in East Jakarta. Also, the feeds always have zebra motifs. Maybe that's their symbol, the zebra." (Caciy, consumer)

"My initial impression of The Tables' Instagram is that they're trendy, and their post designs are always eye-catching, in keeping with The Tables' R&B style." (Sashi, consumer)

These two quotes demonstrate that visual branding works through symbolic consistency. The zebra appears not merely as an ornament, but as a sign of differentiation. The owner also described the zebra symbol as representing a group, visual uniqueness, and eccentric character. Thus, this symbol serves two functions: strengthening brand recognition and building associations with The Tables as a community space.

The Tables positions itself as a lifestyle-focused coffee shop. This positioning emerges not only from the owner's narrative but is also reflected in consumer perceptions. The owner explains that The Tables wants to be known as a house of R&B, a space for expression, a gathering place, and a space that allows consumers to showcase their own style.

"We want to make The Tables known to far more people... as a place that people actually recognize as a house of R&B... people come to be more expressive within

themselves... I feel like I'm coming to a place with my own style" (Sunan, owner of The Tables).

This statement demonstrates that The Tables' lifestyle positioning operates at the level of social identity. The coffee shop is not just a space for coffee consumption, but also a performative space where consumers showcase fashion, interact with the community, enjoy music, and build social networks. Alif captures this positioning as a combination of a coffee shop atmosphere and entertainment.

"I think The Tables' identity is quite strong as a hangout spot that combines a coffee shop atmosphere with entertainment with DJs. So it's relaxed, modern, and accessible to young people" (Alif, consumer).

Meanwhile, Cacy and Sashi both see the R&B character as The Tables' distinguishing feature. This demonstrates that The Tables' lifestyle positioning has been successfully embraced by consumers as a brand identity. In this context, Instagram serves as a medium that visualizes this lifestyle through event posters, ambient content, DJ videos, customer style, and a consistent visual tone.

"As for the character, it's more of an R&B coffee shop, sis... the decorations are R&B posters, very American, and the songs played are also R&B hip-hop" (Cacy, consumer).

"I think it's good. It's rare to find a coffee shop with a character that maintains its R&B vibe so strongly" (Sashi, consumer).

The Tables' differentiation is primarily built through its ambiance. Customers don't prioritize the menu as the most dominant factor in distinguishing The Tables from other coffee shops. Instead, they often mention the interior design, the dim atmosphere, the music, the events, the people who come, and the social experience.

"I think it's comfortable, just comfortable with its dim lighting, indoor smoking area, air conditioning, and it's open until 3 a.m.... the people who come are very social, that's what makes it different," (Cacy, customer).

"What sets it apart is the concept and ambiance, which are the main attractions. It's a great place to relax and hang out, and to chat. So we don't just come to eat or drink, but also to socialize" (Alif, customer).

"What's different is actually the indoor ambiance... they use dimmer lighting, so it feels like we're in a bar" (Sashi, customer).

These three consumer quotes demonstrate a consistent pattern of perception: The Tables is perceived as a place that offers an atmosphere rather than just a product. Ambiance serves

as a bridge between visual branding and brand image. When ambiance is visualized on Instagram, consumers use it as a basis for assessing whether the place aligns with their preferences.

The Tables brand image is formed through consumer associations with aesthetics, comfort, R&B music, modernity, and trust. Consumers consider The Tables' Instagram to effectively convey the place's atmosphere, helping them visualize the experience of visiting. Alif stated that Instagram visuals made him more confident in trying the product and visiting the location, while Sashi said Instagram increased her trust in The Tables.

"Yes. Attractive visuals make me more confident in trying the product and visiting the location in person" (Alif, consumer).

"Oh yeah, definitely, because you can see on Instagram which places are good and which are not, which food is delicious and which is not... so far, The Tables' Instagram is safe, so it increases my trust in The Tables as well" (Sashi, consumer).

Consumer trust is also related to how brands respond to interactions on Instagram. Caciy mentioned that the fast and helpful DM experience made her feel happy and closer to the brand. This shows that brand image is shaped not only by visual appearance, but also by the quality of digital interactions.

"Oh, the admins are really helpful. They saved my glasses, and they respond quickly too" (Caciy, consumer).

"Yes, because communication through stories and DM replies makes The Tables feel more active and connected to customers like me" (Alif, consumer).

Thus, building The Tables' brand image depends not only on the aesthetics of its content but also on its ability to maintain relationships with its audience. Exposure to content allows consumers to feel familiar with a place before physically visiting. For young consumers, social media serves as a visual verification tool before making a decision. The Tables benefit from its strong visual identity, which aligns with the expectations of an audience seeking aesthetically pleasing, comfortable, and distinctive spaces. However, loyalty isn't just born from content; it arises when the experience promised on Instagram matches the on-site experience.

"Instagram is very helpful because some customers who come in really like our place... if they like it here, they'll definitely come back again" (Sunan, owner of The Tables).

Thus, loyalty in The Tables' case can be understood as the result of a match between digital expectations and physical experiences. Instagram shapes expectations, while in-person experiences test those expectations. When the two align, awareness can develop into trust and

loyalty. Although The Tables' branding strategy is considered strong, there are two main challenges. First, consumers feel that The Tables' content focuses too much on R&B, DJs, events, and ambiance, so product or menu information isn't always prominent. Second, the owners realize that not all consumers understand the deeper meaning of The Tables as a house of R&B and a space for expression. This means there's a potential gap between the brand identity they're trying to build and the perceptions of consumers who still see The Tables as a coffee shop or casual hangout.

"There aren't any shortcomings, but it seems like they're too focused on R&B branding to the point of neglecting the menu. Perhaps they could intersperse it with menu branding... since it's a coffee shop after all" (Sashi, consumer).

"Perhaps more content showcasing the customer experience could be featured. Furthermore, the content could be varied to make it more diverse and not solely focused on DJs" (Alif, consumer).

"Regarding their products, maybe they should update more frequently about which ones are available so we know, because they are a coffee shop" (Caci, consumer).

This consumer criticism demonstrates that the strength of lifestyle positioning needs to be balanced with functional information. If the content is too dominated by R&B and events, the brand may appear unique, but consumers may miss important information about the menu, products, promotions, and item availability. In the context of a coffee shop, lifestyle-based differentiation needs to be supported by clear product communication.

"Customer education is important, because perhaps not many customers understand what we're building with The Tables... many still think The Tables is just a coffee shop... or maybe just a hangout" (Sunan, owner of The Tables).

The owner's statement reveals a deeper communication challenge: how to convey to the audience that The Tables isn't just about coffee but also about music, fashion, community, and self-expression. Therefore, the digital development strategy can be directed at content that bridges two needs: strengthening the house of R&B as a unique identity, while clarifying product information, menus, customer experience, and the story behind The Tables concept

5. CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study indicates that Instagram plays a strategic role in shaping The Tables' brand image as an urban coffee shop that not only sells coffee products but also offers lifestyle experiences, music, community, and a social atmosphere. Through consistent visual branding, such as feed design, event posters, zebra symbols, visual tones, R&B content,

and documentation of the space's atmosphere, The Tables has successfully established a brand identity that differentiates it from conventional coffee shops. Word cloud findings and case classification in NVivo show that words such as coffee shop, music, R&B, Instagram, branding, ambiance, identity, community, and lifestyle are key markers in shaping The Tables' image. This confirms that The Tables' brand image is formed by the relationship among the owner's designed identity, the visual messages communicated through Instagram, and consumer perceptions, who see The Tables as a space for youth expression, a gathering place, and a house of R&B.

However, this study also found that the strength of its lifestyle-based positioning needs to be balanced with clearer product communication. Consumers consider The Tables' content strong at conveying atmosphere, music, and events, but information on menus, products, promotions, and item availability still needs improvement. Therefore, the Tables' Instagram communication strategy should strike a balance between symbolic differentiation and functional information. Instagram remains a key medium for shaping initial consumer expectations, increasing trust, and encouraging intention to visit, but loyalty can only be formed if the digital experience aligns with the in-person experience. Therefore, the Tables' brand image can be understood as the result of an integration between visual branding, lifestyle positioning, digital interactions, and the actual consumer experience.

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