

THE ART OF VISUAL MARKETING: LEVERAGING PHOTOGRAPHY FOR STRONGER BRANDING

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses an international community engagement activity conducted at Kun Shan University, Taiwan, on April 16, 2025, involving undergraduate students from the Faculty of Business. The program aimed to enhance students' knowledge and practical skills in visual marketing by introducing the concept of evocative photography and its significance in building strong brand identities. The workshop, titled "The Art of Visual Marketing: Leveraging Photography for Stronger Branding," employed a participatory method through lectures, visual case studies, and interactive demonstrations. Participants explored the psychological and emotional impact of photography in branding, distinguishing between evocative and non-evocative imagery. The session emphasized the importance of authenticity, storytelling, and visual composition in communicating brand values. Practical techniques for smartphone-based photography were also introduced to empower students with accessible tools for content creation. The results showed increased student engagement and understanding of how visual elements influence consumer perception and brand connection. The initiative also fostered intercultural exchange and experiential learning by bringing together academic and creative perspectives in a real-world context. In conclusion, the program effectively contributed to student competency in visual communication and branding strategy while promoting international collaboration and knowledge sharing in the field of marketing.

Keywords: Visual Marketing, Evocative Photography, Branding Strategy, Visual Communication, Smartphone Photography

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's digital and highly competitive business environment, branding is no longer limited to the realms of product quality or pricing strategies. Instead, it encompasses the holistic perception that consumers develop through various touch points—most significantly through visual communication. Among the many tools available to businesses, evocative photography and visual storytelling have emerged as powerful instruments for shaping brand identity, establishing emotional connections, and enhancing consumer engagement (Kamran, 2022; Suryana, 2024).

Scholars increasingly emphasize the significance of integrating visual strategies into branding and marketing efforts. (Kamran, 2022) highlights that the strategic use of imagery in business communication significantly boosts engagement and drives consumer behavior. (Suryana, 2024) supports this by asserting that storytelling fosters immersive experiences that strengthen a brand's emotional appeal. Furthermore, (Rafiqi et al., 2023) found that contextually and culturally relevant photography enhances the authenticity and credibility of a brand, particularly for local or emerging markets.

Visual elements are not merely decorative—they serve as vehicles of narrative, emotion, and identity (Rose, 2022). (Zhou et al., 2021) argue that images with emotional depth create stronger memory retention and brand loyalty than text alone. Meanwhile, Kim and Sullivan, (2022) explore how photo-based narratives influence consumer behavior by engaging subconscious cognitive-emotional processes, linking aesthetics to strategic marketing.

These findings align with the educational needs of students in business and marketing programs, such as those at Kun Shan University, Taiwan, who are preparing to compete in dynamic global markets. While students often acquire theoretical knowledge about branding and communication, there remains a noticeable gap in the practical application of visual media tools. Traditional business curricula may cover visual branding superficially but often fail to provide hands-on training in visual literacy and storytelling (Dillard, 2020; Underwood & Klein, 2021).

The business student community at Kun Shan University reflects a generation motivated to innovate and build impactful brands—yet lacking structured exposure to applied visual communication. Informal feedback from faculty revealed that while some students participated in digital marketing courses, few were introduced to visual storytelling or evocative imagery as tools for emotional engagement and brand authenticity.

This gap became the basis for designing a targeted community engagement initiative: a practical, workshop-based program entitled *The Art of Visual Marketing: Leveraging Photography for Stronger Branding*. This initiative aimed to bridge theoretical and practical knowledge by introducing students to strategic visual communication techniques through photography. The workshop engaged students using interactive lectures, visual case studies, real-time smartphone photography exercises, and reflective discussions on brand identity and consumer psychology.

Grounded in participatory and experiential learning models, the program drew from established frameworks in visual rhetoric, user-centered design, and branding (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020; Wheeler, 2021). Students not only analyzed existing campaigns but also created photo-based narratives tailored to specific branding challenges. These activities empowered students to internalize how visual content communicates values, tells stories, and forms emotional bonds with consumers.

By integrating branding and photography into a single learning experience, this initiative effectively expanded students' understanding of how storytelling through visual elements can become a compelling strategic advantage in a content-driven economy. The workshop's interdisciplinary nature also fostered intercultural exchange and opened pathways for collaborative learning between business and creative disciplines—an increasingly valuable synergy in the global branding landscape.

2. METHOD

This community engagement program employed a participatory, workshop-based method designed to address the lack of practical skills in visual marketing among undergraduate business students at Kun Shan University, Taiwan. The activity was structured to meet students' needs in using photography as an effective branding tool, with an emphasis on emotional appeal, authenticity, and storytelling.

Prior to implementation, a situational analysis was conducted through informal interviews with local faculty and student representatives to assess students' familiarity with branding concepts and their ability to apply visual strategies in business contexts. The assessment revealed a gap between theoretical marketing knowledge and practical visual communication skills—a challenge similarly noted in recent marketing education literature (Zollo, 2020).

The program was conducted on April 16, 2025, in Tainan, Taiwan, lasting approximately 3 hours. It involved undergraduate business students from Kun Shan University, selected through purposive sampling coordinated by the university's international office. The selection criteria targeted students with a basic understanding of marketing and an interest in digital branding.

Data were collected through direct observation, participatory feedback during Q&A sessions, and written reflections submitted by students post-session. Instruments such as presentation materials and reflection guides were reviewed by two academic experts in marketing communication and visual

design to ensure content validity. Standardized instruction and activity delivery were employed to maintain reliability.

The workshop adopted a visual storytelling framework adapted to mobile-based tools and social platforms, encouraging students to craft brand-aligned visuals using smartphones. The approach emphasized emotion, narrative, and composition, consistent with contemporary practices in branding and marketing pedagogy (Huang & Liu, 2021). Participants analyzed visual branding case studies, such as PizzaExpress, and created their own content, which was then peer-reviewed and critiqued in a collaborative learning session.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 The condition of visual marketing understanding before the activity

Prior to the community engagement program, students from the Faculty of Business at Kun Shan University displayed limited practical knowledge regarding the strategic function of photography in branding. While they were familiar with traditional marketing frameworks, their understanding of how visual elements—particularly photography—could influence consumer emotion and brand loyalty was underdeveloped. Informal pre-session assessments revealed that most students perceived photography as merely a decorative or aesthetic component, not a strategic communication tool.

3.2 The process of knowledge transfer and student participation

The activity was held in a classroom environment at Kun Shan University, Taiwan, on April 16, 2025. The session, titled *"The Art of Visual Marketing: Leveraging Photography for Stronger Branding,"* used a lecture-discussion format supported by visual presentations and case studies. Students were introduced to the difference between evocative and unevocative photography, and how emotional appeal plays a critical role in brand storytelling. They actively participated in interpreting the case study images and contributed reflections on how such techniques could enhance their personal or group branding efforts. The session's participatory nature fostered two-way engagement between the speaker and the audience, promoting open discussion and inquiry.

3.3 The condition after the activity and community response

Post-activity reflections indicated a positive shift in student awareness regarding the function of visual content in branding. Students expressed a stronger appreciation for photography as a medium of emotional communication, and many identified new opportunities to apply this knowledge in their future business campaigns or branding coursework. This transformation in mindset, although theoretical, marked a significant impact in bridging the gap between business theory and creative application. Faculty feedback also noted increased student interest in interdisciplinary approaches involving design and marketing, indicating broader academic engagement.

3.4 The community impact and adoption of innovation

While the session did not involve product development or skill-based certification, it successfully introduced students to innovative concepts in visual communication within a business context. The community—comprising local and international students—gained new perspectives on brand building through photography. Though no specific innovation was implemented during the activity, the adoption of new thinking patterns around brand visuals and emotional targeting in marketing communication was evident. The potential for future collaborations, including applied workshops or creative branding labs, was positively received by both participants and university staff.

3.5 Photos and figures



Figure 1. (a) The lecturer explains the difference between evocative and unequivocal photography using visual case studies. (b) Students show active engagement by taking notes and responding to visual prompts during the session.

Figure 1 illustrates key moments from the community engagement workshop. Figure 1a shows the lecturer explaining evocative versus unequivocal photography using brand-related images. Figure 1b captures student engagement, with participants taking notes and actively analyzing visual materials. These photos document not only the material delivery but also the active involvement of students, emphasizing the success of the participatory approach.

4. CONCLUSION

The community engagement activity “The Art of Visual Marketing: Leveraging Photography for Stronger Branding” successfully achieved its targets by enhancing the practical understanding of visual marketing among business students at Kun Shan University. The program effectively addressed the gap between theoretical marketing knowledge and the application of photography as a strategic branding tool, aligning well with the students’ needs for hands-on skills in visual communication.

The participatory workshop method proved appropriate for empowering the community by fostering active learning, critical thinking, and collaborative knowledge exchange. This approach responded directly to the challenges of limited exposure to visual storytelling within the business curriculum, offering accessible techniques through smartphone photography and case study analysis.

The impact of the activity was significant, as evidenced by increased student engagement, positive shifts in mindset towards the emotional and strategic role of photography, and greater interest in interdisciplinary branding strategies. The program also facilitated intercultural exchange and laid a foundation for further innovation in visual marketing education.

For future community empowerment efforts, it is recommended to expand the scope of such workshops into longer-term, skill-based programs that include hands-on projects, peer mentoring, and certification to deepen practical competencies. Additionally, fostering ongoing collaborations between business and design faculties could enhance integrated learning experiences and support continuous innovation in branding practices.

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CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that there are no financial, professional, or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this article. The funding institution, Universitas Tarumanagara, had no role in the design of the study, data collection and analysis, writing of the article, or the decision to submit it to JICESD. None of the authors serve or have previously served on JICESD's editorial board. Additionally, the authors do not work, nor have they worked, for any organization that may benefit from the publication of this article.

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