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DEVELOPING A VISUAL MARKETING EVALUATION FRAMEWORK FOR AI GENERATED BRAND ASSETS : EVIDENCE FROM PHOTO ELICITATION INTERVIEWS IN A SUSTAINABLE STARTUP CONTEXT

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Abstract

This study develops a practical framework for evaluating AI-generated brand visuals in a marketing communication context. Using a qualitative case study of an Indonesian sustainable startup (I-NewBee), the research employs photo-elicitation interviews to compare consumer evaluations of brand assets generated by three text-to-image tools (Midjourney, Neural Love AI, and Leonardo AI). Twelve target-market participants assessed anonymized visual sets (A/B/C) produced under a standardized prompt structure, using a semi-structured protocol informed by attention-stage cues from the AISAS model. Expert input from a visual communication design practitioner was used to triangulate judgments on visual quality and brand fit. Data were analyzed through iterative coding and thematic synthesis to identify recurring evaluation dimensions and decision cues. The findings suggest that perceived brand fit is shaped by visual realism, compositional clarity, brand-consistent signals, and message interpretability, while prompt ambiguity and inconsistent visual cues reduce credibility. The paper contributes an actionable evaluation framework—expressed as evaluation dimensions and prompt-design considerations—for startups seeking to deploy generative AI responsibly in brand communication.

Keywords : *Marketing Visual Communication, Artificial Intelligence, Digital Marketing Optimization, Marketing Resource Management, AISAS Model, I-NewBee*.

1. INTRODUCTION

Urban beekeeping has been recognized as a practice with significant potential to enhance ecosystem diversity and promote improved environmental governance. Previous research has identified three main dimensions environmental, social, and economiccomprising a total of 17 indicators embedded in urban beekeeping activities. These indicators account for 75% of priority areas and demonstrate a 52.94% potential contribution to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (Zahara et al., 2023). Within this

context, I-NewBee seeks to identify opportunities to establish and promote its presence in the market as a sustainability-oriented startup.

Over the past decade, sustainability-related topics have experienced a gradual increase in public interest, despite periodic fluctuations rather than linear growth. Public engagement remained relatively stable in earlier years before rising more noticeably after 2019, with a significant peak observed between 2020 and 2021. This trend reflects growing awareness and concern regarding sustainability issues, influenced by global environmental discourse and shifting consumer values. Although interest declined slightly after reaching its peak, engagement levels have remained higher than in previous periods, indicating the continued relevance of sustainability-related narratives. As these narratives increasingly circulate through digital platforms, organizations are required to communicate their sustainability values effectively via social media to capture and maintain audience engagement.

In contemporary marketing practice, customer engagement on social media has become a critical performance outcome (Rietveld et al., 2020). Alongside this development, rapid technological advancements have accelerated changes in marketing strategies and tools (Crittenden et al., 2019). One of the most influential technologies driving this transformation is artificial intelligence (AI), which is increasingly adopted in marketing communication, particularly for visual content creation. AI enables companies to optimize marketing strategies, improve efficiency, and enhance interactions with customers (Geyser, 2023; Vega, 2021). Consequently, scholarly research examining the application of AI in marketing has expanded significantly, with many organizations actively experimenting with AI-based solutions (Davenport et al., 2020; Kumar et al., 2019).

As AI adoption accelerates, marketing practitioners worldwide are competing to identify the most suitable AI tools to address their specific marketing needs (Verma, 2021). AI has emerged as a disruptive force within contemporary marketing strategies, reshaping how firms create and distribute content (Anshari, 2018). A wide range of AI applications has been developed to support various marketing functions, including text-to-image generation, image-to-video conversion, automated copywriting, and video enhancement. This diversity reflects the increasing complexity and competitiveness of the AI-driven marketing ecosystem.

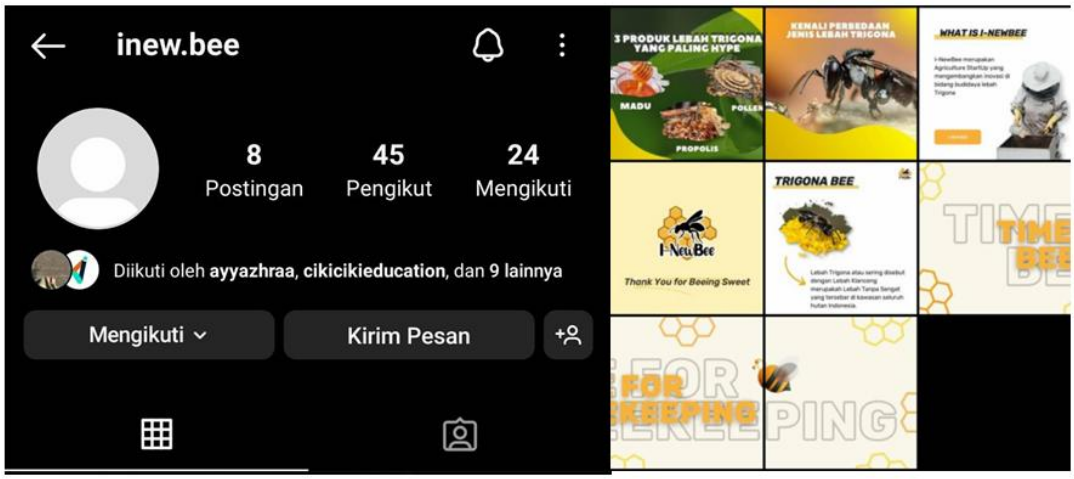
Within the Indonesian context, I-NewBee a company providing products and services for urban beekeepers faces similar challenges in effectively communicating its marketing message. Despite offering diverse services such as trigona honey products, vegetation services, bee colony products, and educational workshops, the company has struggled to achieve meaningful engagement with its target audience. To address these challenges, I-NewBee is considering the adoption of AI-based marketing communication strategies, particularly in visual content creation, to enhance customer engagement and improve communication effectiveness. AI has been shown to support audience segmentation and personalized communication, which can lead to higher engagement levels on social media platforms (Culotta et al., 2015; Kunz et al., 2017).

Advanced marketing execution is often limited by marketing resource management (MRM) constraints. MRM refers to how firms organize and control marketing resources such as budget, people, and technology so that marketing work remains aligned with strategic objectives (Ellering, 2023). In I-NewBee's case, restricted capacity in staffing and

technical know-how reduces its ability to plan and deliver consistent, high-quality marketing outputs.

As digital technologies evolve quickly, social media has become a core channel in organizational marketing strategy (Zhu, 2021). Yet weak marketing practices can translate into low engagement and underperformance (Iqbal, 2022). I-NewBee's social media activity has remained relatively stagnant, reflected in limited interaction with audiences. This appears largely driven by insufficient human resources and expertise to maintain a coherent visual communication strategy, which in turn results in minimal and low-skill content production.

Figure 1. NewBee's Instagram page used as the visual communication baseline



Customer perception plays a crucial role in sustaining business performance, particularly in highly competitive markets (Aulia et al., 2016). Preliminary research conducted on I-NewBee's target market indicates that participants generally hold negative perceptions of the company's Instagram presence. Data saturation reveals that the visual content displayed on I-NewBee's Instagram page is perceived as unattractive, suggesting a weakness in visual communication that may hinder audience engagement.

In response to these findings, I-NewBee is seeking to enhance its marketing capabilities by leveraging artificial intelligence as an additional organizational resource. Through the adoption of AI, the company aims to evaluate the impact of AI-assisted tools on the development of its marketing visual communication. While technological equipment has become increasingly affordable, the acquisition of specialized expertise remains relatively costly, positioning AI as a potential solution to address resource constraints (Allen & Chan, 2021).

Currently, I-NewBee utilizes Instagram as its primary platform to promote urban beekeeping by disseminating informational content related to its products and services. As a startup, this approach represents an initial effort to attract market attention and establish brand awareness. Instagram plays a vital role in digital marketing by influencing audience engagement and information dissemination (Mavroudis, 2018). Accordingly, this research focuses on the attention stage of the AISAS model to examine customer perceptions of AI

utilization in enhancing I-NewBee's digital marketing strategy, particularly in capturing audience attention through AI-generated visual content.

a. Digital Visual Engagement on Instagram

Within digital marketing, Instagram stands out as a platform where engagement is largely mediated by visual stimuli. Its image and video-first design allows brands to translate identity and positioning into recognizable visual cues and narratives, which can enhance attention and initial interest. Empirical research indicates that visual characteristics of posts are linked to measurable engagement outcomes, including likes, comments, and sharing (De Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang, 2012). Therefore, audience responses are often shaped by the perceived attractiveness of the content, the consistency of the visual system, and the emotional associations evoked by the imagery.

Customer engagement on Instagram is often conceptualized as a multidimensional construct involving cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses (Brodie et al., 2011). Studies demonstrate that visually rich content generates stronger emotional responses, which in turn enhance brand recall and attitude formation (Schivinski et al., 2016). For sustainability-oriented brands, visual communication plays an even more critical role, as environmental and ethical values are often conveyed symbolically rather than verbally. Research by Parguel, Benoît-Moreau, and Larceneux (2011) suggests that visual cues can shape consumer perceptions of authenticity and credibility, particularly in sustainability communication.

For startups with limited marketing resources, Instagram offers a cost-efficient platform to build awareness and attract attention. However, ineffective visual strategies can result in low engagement and stagnant audience growth. Rietveld et al. (2020) emphasize that visual differentiation and content relevance are essential for sustaining engagement in competitive social media environments. These findings underscore the importance of optimizing visual communication strategies to align with audience expectations and platform dynamics.

b. Artificial Intelligence and Generative AI in Marketing Communication

The rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) has transformed marketing communication by enabling automation, personalization, and data-driven decision-making. AI technologies are increasingly integrated into marketing processes to enhance efficiency and effectiveness, particularly in content creation and customer interaction (Davenport, Guha, Grewal, & Bressgott, 2020). In recent years, generative AI capable of producing text, images, and videos has gained attention for its potential to support creative marketing activities traditionally reliant on human expertise.

Generative AI tools, such as text-to-image and image-to-video systems, allow marketers to produce visual assets at lower cost and shorter production times. According to Geyser (2023), AI-generated visual content can support brand communication by enabling rapid experimentation with different creative concepts, thereby improving responsiveness to market trends. This capability is particularly valuable for small firms and startups facing constraints in human and financial resources.

Scholars have also examined AI's role in enhancing customer engagement and personalization. AI-driven systems can analyze user behavior and preferences to generate tailored content, increasing relevance and perceived value (Kumar et al., 2019). From a

strategic perspective, AI is considered a disruptive technology that reshapes traditional marketing workflows and resource allocation (Anshari et al., 2018). However, the effectiveness of AI-generated content depends on how audiences perceive its authenticity, creativity, and alignment with brand identity.

Despite growing adoption, empirical research on customer perceptions of AI-generated visual content remains limited. Vega (2021) highlights the need for qualitative approaches to understand how consumers interpret AI-mediated interactions. This gap suggests the importance of evaluating AI-generated brand assets not only in terms of efficiency but also through audience perception and engagement outcomes.

c. Visual Elicitation and Photo-Elicitation in Marketing Research

Visual elicitation methods, particularly photo-elicitation interviews, have been increasingly adopted in marketing and consumer research to explore subjective meanings, perceptions, and emotional responses. Photo-elicitation involves the use of images as stimuli during interviews to provoke deeper reflection and richer narratives from participants (Harper, 2002). Compared to purely verbal methods, visual elicitation can access tacit knowledge and emotional dimensions that may otherwise remain unarticulated.

In marketing research, photo-elicitation has been used to investigate brand perception, advertising effectiveness, and consumer identity construction (Collier & Collier, 1986; Rose, 2016). Images function as interpretive anchors that enable participants to articulate associations, preferences, and evaluations more concretely. This approach is particularly suitable for studying visual marketing content, as it aligns the research method with the nature of the stimulus being evaluated.

studies suggest that visual elicitation is effective in digital and social media contexts, where consumers are constantly exposed to image-based communication. According to Pink et al. (2016), visual methods provide valuable insights into how individuals experience and interpret digital content in everyday contexts. In the case of AI-generated visuals, photo-elicitation offers a means to explore how audiences perceive differences between human-created and AI-created content, including issues of authenticity, trust, and aesthetic appeal. Given the exploratory nature of emerging technologies such as generative AI, qualitative methods like photo-elicitation are particularly appropriate. They allow researchers to capture nuanced customer perceptions that may inform the evaluation of AI-generated brand assets and their role in digital marketing strategies.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This chapter outlines the research design and methodology adopted in the study, including the population and sampling procedures, data collection techniques, and the methods used for data analysis.

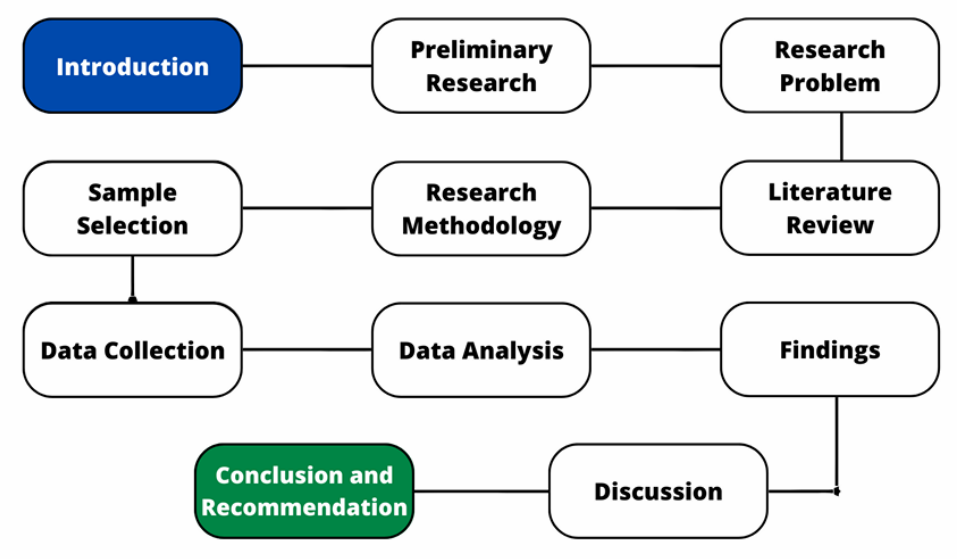


Figure 2. Research design and analysis workflow

Data Collection

This research uses **visual elicitation** as a qualitative method to examine participant perceptions of marketing visuals. Visual elicitation integrates images into in-depth interviews so participants can respond to concrete visual cues and express interpretations that may not surface in text-only questioning (Harper, 2002). The approach can also support more balanced interviewer–participant interaction by shifting attention to shared stimuli and enabling reflexive discussion (Orr et al., 2020). Visual materials used in elicitation may include photographs, illustrations, artworks, and advertisements (Barbour, 2014). Evidence from prior research indicates that incorporating visual prompts can increase the richness of interview data and strengthen rapport, resulting in more detailed and context-sensitive insights (Thomas, 2009; Pain, 2012).

Sampling Method : This study adopts purposive sampling, a technique commonly used in qualitative research to identify and select information-rich cases for the effective use of limited resources (Patton, 2002). Purposive sampling enables closer alignment between the sample selection and the research objectives, thereby enhancing the rigor of the study and the trustworthiness of the findings (Campbell, 2020). This approach involves intentionally selecting individuals who possess relevant knowledge of, or experience with, the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Sampling Size : Participants were recruited using purposive, non-probability sampling to obtain information-rich perspectives aligned with I-NewBee's target market (Baker et al., 2013). Sample size followed a saturation logic, where data collection continues until new interviews no longer yield meaningful new themes (Tongco, 2007; Galvin, 2015). Consistent with prior guidance on purposive interview studies, a total of twelve participants was used as an appropriate benchmark for reaching thematic stability (Guest et al., 2006).

Visual elicitation

Embedding visual prompts in interviews can improve elicitation by shifting participants from abstract descriptions to cue-based interpretation. Visual stimuli broaden what participants can articulate and can surface meanings that remain implicit in standard

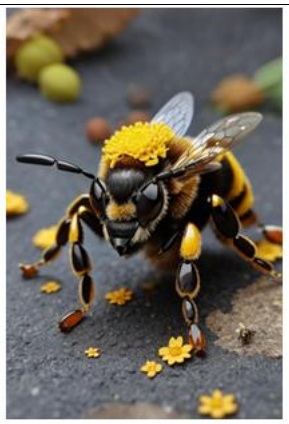
verbal interviews (Bagnoli, 2009). Given that images frequently elicit affective reactions and rapid evaluations, visual approaches are widely used across psychological and social research traditions (Pauwels, 2019). For consumer-perception studies, this typically increases data richness and encourages more expressive, reflective accounts (Thomas, 2009).

In this study, researchers adopt a theoretically sensitive approach by engaging with the data without imposing predefined hypotheses or rigid theoretical frameworks. Instead, existing literature is used to guide lines of inquiry, allowing substantive themes and theoretical insights to emerge inductively from the data (Bytheway, 2018). A set of semi-structured interview questions was developed based on the research objectives. To strengthen analytical rigor, data triangulation was employed by validating findings across multiple perspectives, including customer perceptions, expert evaluations in marketing visualization, and practitioner insights.

This study focuses on text-to-image generative AI as the core technology for producing marketing visuals from standardized prompts. Three platforms (Midjourney, Leonardo AI, and Neural Love AI) were used to generate alternative outputs for the same creative brief. Using identical prompt structures across platforms allows comparison of consumer evaluations while controlling for prompt content and intent. The resulting outputs were then assessed as candidate brand assets (e.g., product imagery, logo concepts, and promotional poster visuals) within a consistent evaluation protocol.

Text to image AI generator : Text-to-image generative AI refers to models that transform a natural-language prompt into a synthetic image. In this study, text-to-image tools were used to generate alternative visual assets from the same prompt set, so participants could compare each output based on perceived brand fit, message clarity, and visual appeal.

Table 1. AI-generated visual outputs by platform under standardized prompts

Prompts were held constant to support controlled cross-platform comparison			
AI Prompt	**MidJourney (A)**	**Neural Love (B)**	**Leonardo (C)**
“stingless bee art look like real picture with color of the bee full black and the size is really small with the name of the stingless is levichep”	 	 	

	 	 	  
"Make a 3D looking logo about urban beekeeping with the name of the company I-NewBee on the middle of the logo with a good tone color and green theme of			

sustainability company”			
"Make a poster about urban beekeeping event with a cute art style, also information about the location, date, and price for joining the event"			

Source: Data Processed, 2026

Visual Elicitation Interview Process : This study employed a visual elicitation interview design. Participants (aged 18–39) were recruited using purposive sampling based on I-NewBee's target market. Each interview was conducted via Zoom with screen-sharing enabled. Participants were shown three AI-generated visual alternatives produced from the same prompt set; to minimize tool-bias, the outputs were anonymized as Image A, Image B, and Image C and presented in a consistent evaluation format.

During the interview, participants were asked to (1) describe their immediate interpretation of each image, (2) evaluate how well it matched I-NewBee's intended brand message, and (3) explain which visual they would most likely engage with on Instagram and why. All sessions were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and prepared for qualitative coding.

Grounded Theory Interview Guideline : Data analysis followed a grounded-theory–informed workflow to develop themes directly from participant explanations. Rather than forcing predefined categories, codes were built inductively from the transcripts and iteratively refined until the categories stabilized and supported a coherent interpretation of how participants evaluated AI-generated visuals.

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Table 2. Semi-Structured Interview Protocol (Visual Elicitation)

Question	
Segment 1 (Product Image)	• Please describe what you notice first in each image (A/B/C). • How realistic and visually appealing is each image? Why? • Which image best fits a sustainable beekeeping brand such as I-NewBee? Please explain. • If you saw these on Instagram, which one would most likely catch your attention?
	Overall, which option (A/B/C) do you prefer for the product image task, and why?
Segment 2 (Logo)	• What brand impression does each logo communicate (A/B/C)? • How clear, memorable, and distinctive is each logo? • How well does each logo align with a sustainability/green theme? • Which logo would you trust most as a real brand identity? Why?
	Overall, which option (A/B/C) performs best for this logo segment based on your evaluation? Please explain.
Segment 3 (Poster)	• What message do you think the poster is trying to deliver (A/B/C)? • How clear is the information and visual hierarchy (what you read/see first)? • Does the style match the event context and brand theme? Why? • Which poster would you be most likely to engage with (e.g., like, save, share, or request more information)?
	Overall, which option (A/B/C) performs best for this poster segment based on your evaluation? Please explain.

Source: *Data Processed, 2026*

Data Analysis

The interview data collected in this study were analyzed using manual coding techniques, a thematic analysis approach, and triangulation to enhance analytical rigor and validity.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

Qualitative Findings

This section reports findings from interviews examining how participants evaluated the AI-generated visual outputs and which visual set was perceived as most suitable for I-NewBee's digital marketing. Interviews were conducted with 12 target-market participants and one visual communication design expert between 8 and 14 August 2023 via Zoom.

Table 3. Participants Profile

Participant Profile			
Code	**Age**	**Sex**	**Location**
P1	20	M	Surakarta

P2	20	M	Bandung
P3	21	M	Depok
P4	22	M	Semarang
P5	20	M	Yogjakarta
P6	21	M	Surakarta
P7	21	F	Bandung
P8	21	F	Surakarta
P9	26	F	Yogyakarta
P10	21	F	Depok
P11	22	M	Bandung
P12	21	M	Jatinangor

Source: *Data Processed, 2026*

Participants (n=12) were recruited from I-NewBee's target market in Java, Indonesia. The sample consisted of 8 males and 4 females, aged 20–26 years, residing in several cities in Java (Surakarta, Bandung, Depok, Semarang, Yogyakarta, and Jatinangor). To protect privacy, participants' identities were anonymized and are reported using participant codes (P1-P12). Only non-identifying demographic information (age, sex, and location) is presented for descriptive purposes.

All participants provided informed consent prior to the interview, and no personally identifying information is disclosed in the manuscript.

Table 4. Expert information profile

Expert Profile			
Code	**Age**	**Sex**	**Location**
E1	31	M	Surakarta

Source: *Data Processed, 2026*

One expert informant (E1) was included to support triangulation. E1 is a visual communication practitioner based in Surakarta (31 years old, male) with expertise in brand identity and digital content production. The expert interview was used to validate the interpretation of visual elements and to assess the professional feasibility of AI-generated brand assets.

Preferred Visual Set for I-NewBee's Digital Marketing (A/B/C)

Across the interviews, participants most frequently expressed a preference for **Set C** (Leonardo AI) as the most suitable option for I-NewBee's digital marketing visuals. The excerpts below illustrate the main reasons participants provided, including perceived visual clarity, theme alignment, and stronger brand fit relative to Sets A and B.

> *'The A is complex but not complete because the color selection is not identical to bees, so I'm afraid the audience will get confused because there are too many colors.' (P11, male, 22)*

> *'Okay, in my opinion, the colors produced by AI A are too black and white and black color. In fact, the contrast is good for black, yellow and white, but the background is too flat, so it feels dead when you look at it.' (P4, male, 20)*

Table 5. Axial coding summary for Set A (Midjourney)

MIDJOURNEY (A)	No distinctive features
	Great Center of Interest
	Good Contrast
	Inactive background
	Unrealistic
	Low sharpness
	Casual appearance
	Easy to remember
	Great Atmosphere
	Low output variation
	Blurred output
	Partial/irrelevant output
	Undelivered message
	Good First Impression
	Theme-color mismatch

Source: *Data Processed, 2026*

Overall, Set A (Midjourney) received mixed evaluations. Participants highlighted strengths related to visual aesthetics such as contrast, a clear focal point, and an initially positive first impression. However, several respondents noted inconsistencies in prompt alignment and theme relevance, including outputs perceived as incomplete, less sharp, or lacking sustainability cues. These issues reduced message clarity and, for some participants, weakened the perceived suitability of the visuals for I-NewBee's brand communication.

> *'For the B itself, yellow and stripes appear on the head color but it's still lacking in color because the background is only white, brown, and a frame.' (P4, female, 26)*
>
> *'For this second one (B), it's just a picture of the bees, there's no concept of sustainability according to the prompt, especially the first one, it looks like a flower or what's in the second picture, instead it looks like a kamen rider mask hahaha.'(P8, male, 21)*

Table 6. Axial coding summary for Set B (Neural Love)

NEURAL LOVE (B)	Flat/inactive background
	Partial/irrelevant output
	Theme-color mismatch
	Unclear message delivery
	Outdated visual style
	Inconsistent outputs
	Generic appearance

	Poor audience fit
	Weak composition/positioning
	Prompt deviation
	No distinctive features
	Unnatural appearance
	Disproportionate elements
	Uncanny/creepy impression
	Poor color grading

Source: *Data Processed, 2026*

Based on the interview results, Neural Love shows strong inclination towards bad visual elements, partial deviating results based on the prompt, irrelevant theme result, unclear message delivery, and bad impression based on the result.

'To be honest, I prefer C because the design is really modern and the colors are cute, like I've never seen a honey product with a logo like that.' (P8, female, 21)

'It's great, it looks the best because the color is better, like the contrast with the details of the picture, if the language of photography is clear, the clarity looks sharper than the others. The atmosphere is also better because there are other objects that support the activities of bees in nature.' (P6, male, 22)

Table 7. Axial coding summary for Set C (Leonardo AI)

LEONARDO AI (C)	Lifelike appearance
	Appropriate background
	Prompt alignment
	Strong color grading
	Strong contrast
	High detail
	Theme-color coherence
	Strong composition
	Good detailed results
	Overcrowded elements
	Positive first impression
	High sharpness
	Modern/fresh look
	High realism
	Output variety
	Clear visual definition
	Rich color palette
	Clear focal point
	Complete visual elements
	Good lighting
	Attention-grabbing
	Subject emphasis

Source: *Data Processed, 2026*

Overall, Set C (Leonardo AI) received the most consistently positive evaluations. Participants commonly described the outputs as clearer, more realistic, and better aligned with the prompt and sustainability-related theme. Recurring cues behind this preference included sharper details, stronger composition, coherent color grading, and a more "complete" visual presentation, which collectively supported message clarity and perceived brand fit.

Selective Data

The following table provides representative excerpts and selective coding evidence that support the axial codes identified for Set C (Leonardo AI). These excerpts illustrate why participants perceived Set C as clearer, more realistic, and better aligned with the brand's theme and message.

Table 8. Selective coding evidence and cross-set comparison of participant themes (Sets A–C)

SELECTIVE CODE		
Key Themes Used to Evaluate AI-Generated Marketing Visuals		
MIDJOURNEY (A)	NEURAL LOVE AI (B)	LEONARDO AI (C)
Participants described Set A as visually appealing with a strong first impression, but several noted inconsistencies with the prompt and weaker thematic alignment. Critiques commonly mentioned incomplete elements and a less informative background, which reduced message clarity.	Set B was generally perceived as less coherent. Participants frequently pointed to prompt deviation, theme-color mismatch, and composition issues that made the visuals feel generic or unclear. These weaknesses reduced perceived suitability for brand communication.	Set C received the most consistently positive responses. Participants highlighted stronger prompt alignment, clearer thematic cues, and better visual composition, which supported message delivery and perceived brand fit.

Thematic Analysis

Table 9 summarizes the key themes derived from participant interviews, comparing how respondents evaluated the three anonymized visual sets (A/B/C) in terms of prompt alignment, thematic coherence, message clarity, and perceived brand fit. The analysis focuses on evaluation cues and recurring reasons rather than treating the results as a platform ranking exercise.

Table 9. Thematic synthesis across visual sets (Sets A–C)

Themes	MidJourney (A)	Neural Love (B)	Leonardo (C)
Visual Elements	Strong visual appea	Visually weaker / less coherent output	Strong visual appeal

Prompt Accuracy	Partial prompt alignment (missing elements)	Prompt deviation (inconsistent output)	High prompt alignment
Message Delivery	Message partially clear; relies on prior knowledge	Message unclear / difficult to interpret	Clearer message; information more interpretable
Theme Relevance	Theme cues inconsistent	Theme mismatch	Stronger theme-context fit
First Impression	Generally positive first impression	Less favorable first impression	Positive first impression

Source: *Data Processed, 2026*

Triangulation

To strengthen the credibility of the findings, participant themes were triangulated with expert feedback from a visual communication design perspective. Expert review was used to confirm, refine, or challenge participant interpretations, particularly regarding visual quality, composition, and brand-fit cues. The triangulation focuses on whether the evaluation criteria identified from participants are consistent with professional visual assessment, rather than treating the results as a simple platform ranking exercise.

Table 10. Triangulation matrix: participant themes vs expert assessment

I-NewBee's Target Market			
Themes	**Participant Summary (Target Market)**	**Expert Validation (VCD Expert)**	**Notes/Implications**
Visual Elements	Set C perceived as clearer and more visually appealing; Set B least coherent.	Confirms stronger composition and clarity in Set C; notes weaker visual hierarchy in Set B.	Visual clarity and composition contribute to perceived brand fit.
Prompt Accuracy	Set C aligned with prompt; Sets A/B often deviated or incomplete.	Confirms Set C shows better prompt adherence; A/B show missing or inconsistent elements.	Prompt specificity + constraint terms matter.
Message Delivery	Set C easiest to interpret; Set B often unclear.	Confirms readability and information cues are stronger in Set C; B lacks	Message clarity depends on visual hierarchy and contextual cues.

		communicative cues.	
Theme Relevance	Set C most relevant to sustainability/brand theme; A/B inconsistent.	Confirms theme-color coherence and context cues are stronger in Set C.	Theme coherence supports trust and consistency.
First Impression	Set C positive first impression; Set B negative.	Confirms Set C appears more "complete" and professional.	First impression is driven by polish + coherence.

Source: *Data Processed, 2026*

DISCUSSION

This discussion interprets the interview findings on how AI-generated marketing visuals were evaluated in I-NewBee's context. By using a qualitative lens, the study captures interpretive cues such as perceived clarity, theme coherence, and brand fit—that are not easily represented through engagement metrics alone. This approach also responds to the rapid evolution of generative AI in recent years and offers an updated view of its role in visual marketing communication.

Consistent with Demir, Ceknis, Yeşilkaynak, and Ünal (2021), the findings suggest that participant judgments were closely tied to fundamental visual design principles, including composition, contrast, color harmony, and the presence of a clear focal point. These elements shape aesthetic evaluation and influence whether a visual is perceived as credible and suitable for brand communication.

Expert feedback further indicates that output quality is highly dependent on prompt specificity. More detailed prompts were described as producing visuals that better match creative intent and reduce deviations in theme and composition. This aligns with Reisenbichler et al. (2022), who emphasize that prompt engineering supports idea facilitation and improves the translation of concepts into generative outputs. In this study, prompt clarity emerged as a practical lever for improving consistency across AI-generated brand assets.

Across the three visual sets, Set C (Leonardo AI) received the most consistently positive responses. Participants and expert assessment converged on similar evaluation cues: stronger prompt alignment, clearer message delivery, and more coherent thematic signals. This pattern is consistent with insights from visual framing theory, which highlights how images communicate meaning through implicit and symbolic cues (Nilsson, 2015). It also aligns with evidence that aesthetic judgments are shaped by early interpretation of subject matter followed by assessment of visual attributes such as lighting, color, and depth cues (Li, 2023).

In practice, Set C was more often described as "complete," visually coherent, and aligned with the intended sustainability-related context.

From an applied perspective, generative AI can support marketing execution under resource constraints by reducing production time and cost while enabling rapid visual iteration (Reisenbichler et al., 2022). As described in recent marketing research, generative systems can produce images and graphics from natural-language prompts, making them a viable tool for content development when combined with structured evaluation and prompt design (Peres, Schreier, Schweidel, & Sorescu, 2023). For I-NewBee, the implication is not simply tool adoption, but embedding prompt standardization and visual screening criteria into the marketing workflow to ensure brand-consistent communication.

4. CONCLUSION

This study examined how AI-generated marketing visuals are evaluated by I-NewBee's target audience and how such tools may support digital marketing execution under resource constraints, with a focus on the attention stage of the AISAS model. Using photo-elicitation interviews and expert triangulation, the analysis identified recurring evaluation cues related to visual clarity, prompt alignment, message interpretability, theme coherence, and first impression.

Across the three anonymized visual sets, participants most consistently favored Set C (Leonardo AI). The preference was primarily attributed to stronger perceived prompt alignment, clearer thematic signals, and a more coherent and "complete" visual presentation, which collectively supported message clarity and perceived brand fit. Expert feedback was broadly aligned with these participant themes, reinforcing the importance of composition, visual hierarchy, and prompt specificity as practical determinants of output quality.

From a managerial perspective, the findings suggest that generative AI can be integrated into I-NewBee's marketing workflow as a supporting tool for producing Instagram-ready visual assets. However, effective implementation requires more than tool selection: the company should standardize prompt components (e.g., brand attributes, style constraints, context cues, and key message), apply a simple screening checklist based on the evaluation dimensions identified in this study, and conduct a brief target-audience review before publication. Overall, this research contributes practical guidance on how AI-driven image generation can support marketing communication by strengthening attention-stage outcomes through clearer, more brand-consistent visuals.

5. RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

Despite the contributions of this study, several limitations should be acknowledged.

First, this research adopts a qualitative approach using photo-elicitation interviews with a limited number of participants drawn from the target market of a single sustainable startup, I-NewBee. While this approach enables a deep exploration of customer perceptions, the findings are context-specific and may not be generalizable to other industries, organizational scales, or cultural settings.

Second, the study focuses exclusively on the attention phase of the AISAS model, emphasizing initial visual engagement and first impressions of AI-generated brand assets. Other stages of the customer journey such as interest, search, action, and sharing were not examined. As a result, the study does not capture the downstream behavioral effects of AI-generated visuals on purchasing decisions or long-term brand engagement.

Third, the scope of the study is limited to selected generative AI tools, particularly text-to-image platforms. Given the rapid development of generative AI technologies, emerging tools and multimodal systems (e.g., text-to-video or interactive AI) may yield different visual outcomes and customer perceptions that were not addressed in this research.

Finally, the analysis relies primarily on subjective perceptions and interpretive insights derived from participant interviews and expert triangulation. Although this approach enhances contextual understanding, it does not incorporate quantitative performance indicators such as engagement metrics, conversion rates, or algorithmic reach, which could provide additional empirical validation of the findings.

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