
VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF INDONESIAN LOCAL PERFUME ADVERTISEMENT IN SOCIAL MEDIA

Anisa Pratiwi*, Harni Kartika-Ningsih

Department of Linguistics, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Indonesia, Kampus UI Depok, Pondok Cina,
Depok, Jawa Barat, Indonesia 16424

*Email: anisa.pratiwi@ui.ac.id

Received: 30 Aug 2025

Revised: 19 Dec 2025

Accepted: 24 Dec 2025

Published: 31 Mar 2026

Abstract: This study examines how Indonesian local perfume advertisements on Instagram construct visual meaning using Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar framework. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, the study analyzes 25 Instagram posts (53 images in total) from three Indonesian perfume brands, focusing on representational, interactional, and compositional dimensions. The findings indicate that perfume advertisements predominantly foreground the product through a combination of narrative and conceptual representations, indirect audience positioning, and visually salient composition. This study shows that visual grammar plays a key role in shaping how advertising messages are structured and interpreted within the visually driven context of Instagram.

Keywords: instagram advertisement, perfume advertisement, visual grammar

Abstrak: Penelitian ini menganalisis bagaimana iklan parfum lokal Indonesia di Instagram membangun makna secara visual menggunakan kerangka kerja gramatika visual Kress dan van Leeuwen. Menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif, penelitian ini menganalisis 25 unggahan Instagram (dengan total 53 gambar) dari tiga merek parfum Indonesia, dengan fokus pada dimensi representasional, interaksional, dan komposisional. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa iklan parfum secara dominan menonjolkan produk melalui kombinasi representasi naratif dan konseptual, pemosisian audiens secara tidak langsung, serta komposisi visual yang menonjol. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa tata bahasa visual memainkan peran kunci dalam membentuk cara pesan iklan disusun dan diinterpretasikan dalam konteks visual yang mendominasi di Instagram.

Kata kunci: gramatika visual, iklan instagram, iklan parfum

INTRODUCTION

In this digital age, social media has become the dominant platform for communication, marketing, and cultural expression. Among these platforms, Instagram stands out as a medium centered on visual representation, enabling brands to construct narratives primarily through images (Rogers, 2021). With more than two billion of active users around the world, Instagram has transformed to a powerful tool for business to reach and interacted with the brand target audience (Carah et al., 2023). Its emphasis on visual content, supported by features such as single-image posts, carousel posts, stories, and reels, allows advertisers to organize visual elements strategically in order to communicate product value and brand identity.

Originally launched as a photo-sharing application (Zappavigna, 2016), Instagram has evolved into a multimodal platform integrating images, videos, and text. This evolution has transformed how brands communicate with audiences, enabling the delivery of persuasive messages through carefully curated visual arrangements (Hidarto, 2021). This visual orientation makes Instagram particularly suitable for advertising products such as perfume, which rely heavily on sensory appeal and symbolic representation (Aliyev, 2025). Because scent cannot be experienced directly through digital media, perfume advertising usually depends on visual strategies to evoke emotion, atmosphere, and lifestyle associations. For example, an Instagram post can feature a perfume bottle alongside flowers, hands, or a scenic background, creating a narrative that transcends the product itself to evoke a sense of nature or elegance (Figure 1).

The visual nature of Instagram ads is increasingly enhanced by the platform's emphasis on high-quality images and curated aesthetics (Aljukhadar et al., 2020). This focus on visual appeal is particularly important in the beauty and lifestyle industries, where consumers are attracted to ads that not only highlight the product but also convey the identity they want to project (Kuksov et al., 2013; Phillips et al., 2014). For example, a perfume brand may use soft pastel colors and natural elements such as flowers or water to convey freshness and softness, while another brand may use bold, contrasting colors to convey modernity and maturity. These visual choices are not arbitrary; they are carefully designed to align with the brand's identity and target audience (du Plessis, 2021).



Figure 1. Example of a perfume advertisement on Instagram
Source: Personal Documentation (2025)

In addition to its visual affordances, Instagram provides interactive features such as likes, comments, and shares, allowing brands to engage directly with audiences and foster a sense of familiarity and brand loyalty (Aljukhadar et al., 2020). Through visual storytelling supported by limited

textual cues, advertisements often construct narratives that extend beyond product display, incorporating symbolic objects, everyday settings, and ritualized practices. As a result, Instagram advertisements constitute a productive site for examining how visual elements are organized to represent products and position audiences.

In Indonesia, the growth of local perfume brands on Instagram reflects broader developments in the country's digital economy and social media culture. These advertisements often use visual storytelling techniques to create impressions that match the product type, brand identity, and target audience (Bevins, 2014). At first glance, many of their advertisements appear to employ familiar visual strategies commonly found in perfume advertising more broadly, such as product-centered composition, symbolic props, and controlled camera angles. While these visual strategies may appear ordinary or generic, their repeated and systematic use raises important analytical questions about how meaning is organized and naturalized within the local Instagram context.

Despite the growing visibility of Indonesian local perfume advertisements, research that systematically examines how such visual choices construct meaning and shape audience relations remains limited. Existing studies on advertising visuals often focus on global brands or general creative strategies, leaving the visual organization of highly visible local brands underexplored. This gap is significant because dominant brands with large followings contribute to shaping normative visual practices and consumer expectations on social media platforms.

This study therefore investigates the visual representation of Indonesian local perfume advertisements on Instagram using Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006, 2020) visual grammar framework. Focusing on representational, interactional, and compositional dimensions, the study

examines how visual elements are organized, how audiences are positioned in relation to the product, and how perfume is visually represented across advertisements from prominent local brands. The research is guided by the following questions: 1) How are visual elements composed in Indonesian perfume advertisements on Instagram? 2) How do Indonesian perfume advertisements on Instagram position the audience in relation to the product? 3) How are Indonesian perfumes represented visually in Instagram advertisements?

Theoretical Framework: Visual Grammar

Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) concept of visual grammar is a comprehensive framework for analyzing how meaning is constructed in visual communication. Rooted in the principles of systemic functional linguistics, this framework extends Halliday's (1985) concept of metafunctions—ideational, interpersonal, and textual—to the analysis of images. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, 2020) divide this framework into three parts: representational, interactional, and compositional meaning. Representational meaning examines how participants, processes, and settings are depicted in an image, distinguishing between narrative (action-oriented) and conceptual (idea-oriented) representations. Interactional meaning focuses on how images position the audience in relation to the subject, taking into account elements such as contact, social distance, and attitude. Compositional meaning, on the other hand, analyzes how visual elements are arranged to create coherence and emphasis, using principles such as salience, framing, and informational value.

METHODS

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach to examine the visual organization of Indonesian local perfume advertisements on Instagram through the framework of visual grammar proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, 2020). The focus of the analysis is on how visual elements are structured to construct representational, interactional, and compositional meanings in advertising images.

The data consists of 25 Instagram posts from three Indonesian perfume brands—SAFF&Co., Carl&Claire, and HMNS—a total of 53 still images, published between November 2024 and February 2025 (Table 1). The perfume brands were selected based on the number of single-post and carousel posts (posts with a photo slide feature) in the span of those 4 months, and also the number of followers on their official Instagram accounts at the time the data were collected (on February 2025)¹. Follower size was used as a practical indicator of brand visibility and audience reach on the platform, allowing the study to focus on local perfume brands that had achieved relatively high levels of recognition within the Indonesian Instagram market. By examining brands with substantial followings, the study aims to capture dominant visual practices employed by local perfume advertisers on Instagram rather than marginal or experimental cases.

The selected dataset includes both single-image posts and carousel posts, which allow brands to present multiple visual perspectives within one upload. Only posts explicitly featuring perfume products were included, while testimonial posts, concept photos without products, and posts in video format—such as reels, were excluded from this study for the sake of data equality and consistency. Carousel posts will be analyzed per image.

This study focuses exclusively on the visual elements of the posts to maintain the concentration of the analysis on the images. Each image was

coded and categorized based on recurring visual elements, such as the presence of perfume bottles, objects that appeared (e.g., hands, flowers, food, and other objects), and the overall composition. The framework of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006; 2020) was used to analyze the representational, interactional, and compositional meanings in these images.

Table 1 Data Quantity Summary

No.	Brand	Followers Count ¹	Analyzed Posts Count		Analyzed Posts Count per Brand
			Single Post	Carousel	
1	HMNS	453.549	6	1	7
2	Saff&Co.	156.391	1	7	8
3	Carl&Claire	76.516	3	7	10
Total of Analyzed Posts					25

Source: Personal Documentation (2025)

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section examines how Indonesian local perfume advertisements on Instagram organize visual elements to construct product representation and audience relations. Rather than treating visual techniques as isolated stylistic choices, the analysis focuses on how recurring visual configurations function as patterned strategies across highly visible local brands. Although many of the visual elements observed—such as product-centered composition, symbolic props, and controlled camera angles—are commonly used in perfume advertising, their systematic organization within the Indonesian Instagram context reveals specific ways in which meaning is stabilized and naturalized. Through the lens of visual grammar (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, 2020), these advertisements are analyzed as visual texts that transform perfume from a commercial object into a culturally meaningful product associated with lifestyle, ritual, and everyday aspiration.

Visual Representation

The visual representation of Indonesian perfumes in Instagram advertisements utilizes dynamic interactions between narrative and conceptual depictions, tailored to each brand's identity and audience. Perfumes are not only framed as products, but also as carriers of meaning.

Narrative representations, which depict perfume in action or interaction, appeared 26.4% of the time. For example, HMNS shows hands clutching a bottle tightly (Figure 2), positioning the perfume as a controlled and singular object within the frame. The close-up framing and limited visual access reduce contextual distractions and foreground the physical contact between the hand and the product. In visual grammar terms, this configuration establishes a close social distance and emphasizes the material presence of the perfume, constructing it as an object that is personally possessed rather than publicly displayed. When paired with text inviting audience participation—such as the call-to-action encouraging viewers to vote for the product's re-release date in Figure 2—the image frames the perfume as both selectively accessible and socially negotiated within the brand's community. Meanwhile, SAFF&CO uses narrative representations in advertisements—such as the carousel post in Figure 3a, which implies the

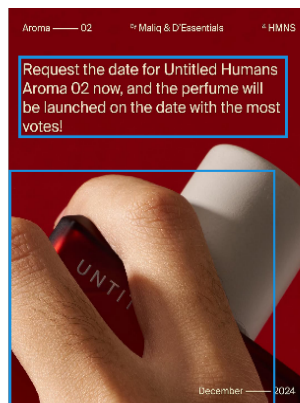


Figure 2. HMNS ads with a hand as object and call-to-action text
Source: Personal Documentation (2025)

discovery of a product, or Figure 3b, which implies a narrative with a bookstore setting.



Figure 3. Narrative form through photos in carousel-type posts
Source: Personal Documentation (2025)

In contrast, conceptual representations abstract perfume into symbols of luxury, nature, or ritual. SAFF&CO, for example, elevates perfume bottles into ethereal objects by pairing them with floating flowers (Figure 4a) or placing them on a beach backdrop alongside smartphones (Figure 5), as if blending modernity with nature. In both posts, perfume becomes a lifestyle accessory whose meaning is tied to urban comfort—marked by smartphones—and organic nature—represented by flowers and beach backgrounds. This is related to the tendency of brands as advertisers to feature perfume ingredients or scents in advertisements (Xu & Yang, 2025). Carl&Claire strongly emphasizes the ritual of gift-giving and food pairings (Figure 4c) with the concept of Christmas celebrations, positioning perfume as part of a curated lifestyle.



Figure 4. Object identification in advertisement images: (a) product and flowers, (b) product and smartphone, (c) product, food, and decorations in a Christmas-themed advertisement
Source: Personal Documentation (2025)

The symbolic attributes that accompany the perfume further enrich its representational meaning. Hand objects (19%) appear to humanize the product photos, as in Figure 2, where a firm grip is combined with text that hints at exclusivity. Images of nature (32%, mostly from SAFF&CO)—such as beaches and flowers—frame perfume as a bridge between the urban world and nature. The concepts of food and holidays from Carl&Claire touch on nostalgia and the culture of enjoying meals, in line with the tradition of gift-giving at Christmas. In addition, there are gender roles and social actors. HMNS distinguishes between male hands (Figure 2) and female hands (Figure 5, seen as slender with matching nail colors) to advertise the same product with different narratives. Figure 2 invites viewers to choose the re-release date, while Image 5 announces that the product will be back. There are also partial figures—such as Figure 4b and 4c—which make the models anonymous objects with a focus on lifestyle rather than identity, while models whose faces are visible (Figure 6) personalize an experience—in this case, gift-giving.

Taken together, these representational patterns indicate that Indonesian local perfume advertisements systematically rely on culturally resonant symbols—hands, nature, food, and ritual—to construct perfume as an object embedded in everyday life. Rather than emphasizing sensuality or individual desire, the visual grammar of these advertisements frames

perfume as socially situated, aligning with values of community, balance, and curated daily experience.



Figure 5. An ad featuring a woman's hand (blue rectangle) picking up a perfume bottle (yellow rectangle) with two fingers
Source: Personal Documentation (2025)



Figure 6. Woman smiling with gift package and products (yellow rectangle)
Source: Personal Documentation (2025)

Product Interaction with Audience

From an interactional perspective, Indonesian perfume advertisements on Instagram predominantly position the audience through indirect visual engagement.

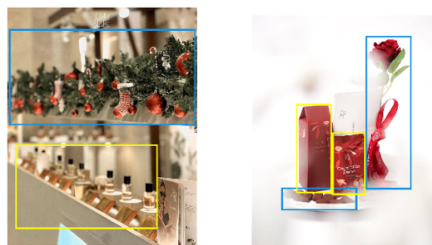


Figure 7. Thematic advertisement images: (a) Christmas-themed promotional booth, (b) Valentine's Day-themed product advertisement
Source: Personal Documentation (2025)

Most advertisements (56.6%) feature photos without direct eye contact with the audience (offer), focusing on the product or its symbolic context rather than direct engagement with the audience. For example, HMNS advertisements often focus on perfume bottles—as in Figures 2 and 4b—positioning the product as an autonomous object of desire. Similarly, SAFF&CO does not show human faces in 65% of its images (for example, only showing half of the body in Figures 4b and 4c), shifting attention to the integration of perfume into an aspirational lifestyle. Carl&Claire also follows this trend, with 92.3% of images emphasizing curated displays rather than human models. For example, a Christmas-themed photo marked with distinctive decorations and an upload date close to Christmas (Figure 7a), a Valentine's Day-themed product photo (Figure 7b) marked with chocolate and red objects ranging from roses and ribbons to product packaging. Direct engagement (demand) appears less frequently (43.3%) and is predominantly mediated through text (for example, the call-to-action text in Figure 8a, “*Ceritain ke kita...*” that means “Tell us...”) or implied interaction (for example, the text “Morfosia detected” in Figure 8b). This indirect approach invites the audience to imagine the brand identity or theme of the image in the narrative.

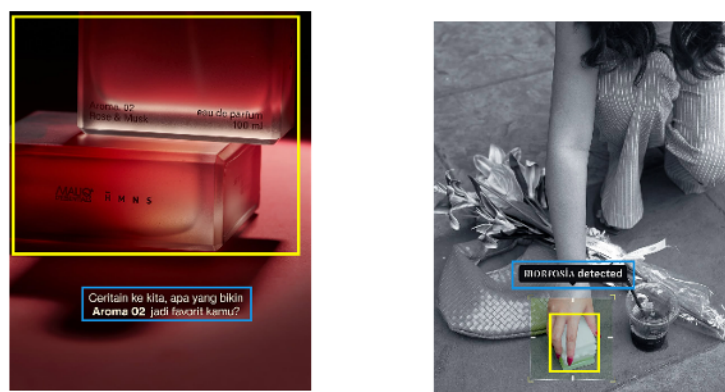


Figure 8. Product advertisement images with call-to-action and implied interaction: (a) product photos with call-to-action text, (b) product advertisements showing implied interaction through text and gestures

Source: Personal Documentation (2025)

The use of close-up shots, medium shots, and long shots in product placement varies among brands. Samples from HMNS, for example, use close-up techniques, such as a portrait of a hand holding a product (Figure 2) and a close-up portrait of two products (Figure 8a) to convey closeness. Close-ups are also found in several SAFF&CO brand posts, such as Figure 3b on the right and Figure 9a, to highlight a personal impression. In addition, there are 8 medium shots out of 20 images (for example, Figure 4c) to imply affordable luxury. In contrast, Carl&Claire mostly uses long shots in 12 of its images (e.g., product display in Figure 9b) to emphasize brand authority. With the same number of images, Carl&Claire also applies medium shots to combine a friendly and classy impression (e.g., product positioning in Figure 4c).

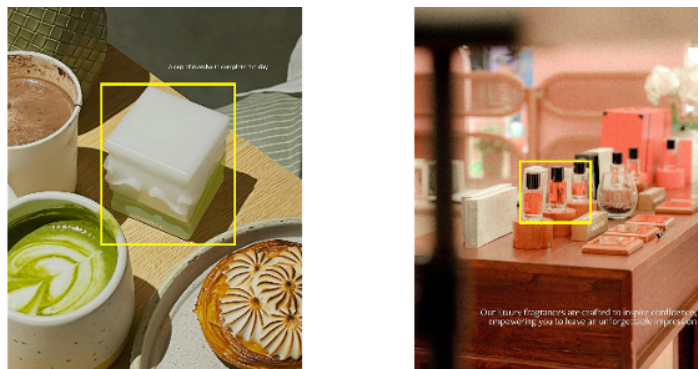


Figure 9. Product photography composition: (a) high-angle close-up props, (b) long shot of the product on display
Source: Personal Documentation (2025)

Additionally, the angle of the shot refines the audience's relationship with the product. The eye-level perspective, seen in Carl&Claire's posts, creates an impression of an egalitarian relationship between the product and the audience—as in Figure 10a. The frontal angle also appears in several posts, such as Figures 2, 5, and 7b. High angles are widely used by SAFF&CO and Carl&Claire, framing perfume as a treasure discovered by the audience (such as the series in Figure 3a) or a curated luxury item (for example, the Christmas theme in Figure 10b). Conversely, low angles are less common

overall but are used deliberately in some images, such as the monumental bottle in Figure 10c or the floating perfume bottle in Figure 4, which elevate the status of the product.



Figure 10. Product photography composition: (a) high-angle close-up props, (b) long shot of the product on display

Source: Personal Documentation (2025)

Overall, these patterns show how Indonesian perfume brands use interactional meaning to negotiate commercial objectives through culturally situated visual practices on Instagram. Rather than representing Indonesian culture through explicit national or traditional symbols, the advertisements reflect shared norms of digital interaction within the local social media context, such as indirect visual engagement, restrained use of demand images, and the prioritization of lifestyle scenarios over direct address. The dominance of indirect gaze positions perfume as an autonomous object of desire rather than a product requiring immediate persuasion. Social distance varies depending on the brand: HMNS emphasizes intimacy through close-up shots, SAFF&CO balances accessibility and aspiration through medium shots embedded in lifestyle settings, and Carl&Claire projects authority through long shots of curated displays. Camera angles further shape interactional relations—high-angle shots position viewers as discoverers, eye-level perspectives foster an equal relationship between audience and product, and low-angle shots elevate the product’s status. This configuration aligns with

Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006, 2020) interactional meaning framework and demonstrates how commercial communication on Instagram is shaped by culturally shared conventions of visual address rather than overt symbolic representations of national identity.

Compositional Strategies

This analysis shows that several Indonesian perfume advertisements on Instagram use deliberate compositional strategies to balance informational value, framing, and salience, tailored to each brand's identity. Overall, 56% of images have a center-margin composition (Figure 11a), which may indicate that the advertisement's focus remains on the product being marketed. Product placement is the main determinant in the visual hierarchy: HMNS predominantly places perfume bottles in the center (center-margin) of its sample uploads, with variations tilted (Figure 8a and 10c) or held by models (Figure 5) to signify exclusivity and dynamism. Conversely, SAFF&CO integrates product placement and text into a lifestyle context (Figure 3) and a visual theme that matches (visual rhyme) the product packaging in its uploads, such as a beach background (Figure 4c) or a cafe (Figure 9a), thus becoming an element that emphasizes the role of perfume as a complement to daily activities. Carl&Claire places perfume in the center of the image in 61% of its total images, while utilizing supporting properties around the product (e.g., food and Christmas decorations as in Figure 10b) to frame it as part of a curated experience. The ideal-real format also appears in posts with a combination of visuals and text (Figure 6 and 10b), as well as visuals alone (Figure 11b).

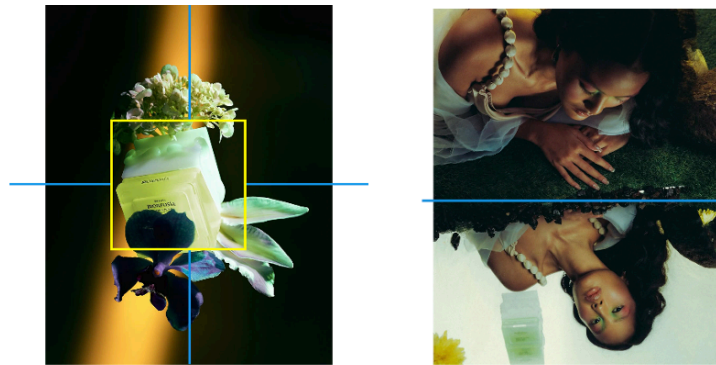


Figure 11. Visual composition in product images: (a) center-margin composition, (b) ideal-real composition with clear boundaries between elements
Source: Personal Documentation (2025)

Saliency is created through background contrast, size, position, sharpness focus, and color. The choice of color composition in advertisements often tends to match the packaging (Seher et al., 2012), or even contrast with it. HMNS relies on a red color palette with a dark background (Figure 5) to highlight its products, while SAFF&CO uses cool blue colors (Figure 4c) and various shades of green (Figure 4 and 9a) to convey a strong natural feel in line with the color tone and packaging accents. Carl&Claire dominates with warm tone filters (see Figures 4b, 6, 7b, 9b, 10b) with a vintage feel (with grains like Figure 10a and images that have high contrast with the background (Figure 7a) to create appeal.

CONCLUSION

This study explores how Indonesian local perfume advertisements on Instagram organize visual meaning using Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006, 2020) visual grammar framework. By focusing on representational, interactional, and compositional dimensions, the analysis demonstrates how visual elements are systematically arranged to communicate product identity and position audiences within a social media advertising context.

The findings reveal that Indonesian perfume advertisements combine narrative and conceptual representations to frame perfume as both a functional product and a lifestyle-oriented symbolic object. Interactional meanings are constructed primarily through indirect gaze, controlled social distance, and strategic camera angles, encouraging viewers to engage with the product as an object of contemplation rather than through direct interpersonal address. Compositional strategies—such as central placement, salience through color and contrast, and stylistic consistency—support coherent brand identities and guide viewer attention. Together, these visual grammar resources illustrate how local perfume brands employ shared conventions of Instagram advertising to achieve commercial goals while aligning with culturally situated norms of digital visual communication. Collectively, these strategies reinforce the role of perfume not only as a commodity but also as a cultural marker through advertising imagery. These choices also reflect diverse understandings of the Instagram platform—where audiences simultaneously act as consumers and potential consumers (Adegbola et al., 2018).

This study is limited to qualitative analysis of visual grammar and does not incorporate quantitative indicators such as audience engagement metrics. Future research could integrate interaction data to examine how specific visual configurations relate to audience response. Comparative studies involving perfume advertisements from other cultural or regional contexts may also offer further insight into how visual grammar practices vary across markets and platforms.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author would like to thank the supervisor and academic peers for their valuable feedback and discussions during the development of this article. The author also acknowledges institutional support from the affiliated university. This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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