

Strategic Visuality: Exploring the Role of Imagery in Brand Visual Language—A Case Study of Renault Kwid



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Abstract Although the concept of image has been examined across multiple disciplinary fields, there remains a notable gap in scholarly literature regarding the role of imagery in constructing a brand's symbolic repertoire, meaning, and communicative strategies. This study aims to investigate the relationship between brand imagery and brand personality, with the objective of proposing parameters that inform the development of photographic aesthetics within a brand's visual language. This article focuses on car brands and employs a literature review combined with case study analysis to systematically examine the Imagery (Photographic style and/or Illustration/Iconography) of the Renault Kwid. The study seeks to identify elements within photographic representations that align with the brand's DNA and narrative, in order to define key points of contact that can reinforce these strategic attributes. The findings include the identification of analytical parameters for evaluating brand imagery and demonstrate their applicability in monitoring and assessing the relevance and communicative function of images within brand communication.

Keywords Car brands · Brand personality · Brand visual language · Brand imagery/photography

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1 Introduction

This study offers a comprehensive analysis of key parameters that may influence the selection of a specific typology of Imagery—such as photographic style, illustration, or iconography—for a brand’s visual language. It highlights potential correlations between brand personality and the decision-making processes related to imagery. The objective is to identify connections between a brand’s visual representations and its personality, thereby proposing parameters that can guide the definition of photographic aesthetics within the brand’s distinctive visual identity. Olins (2008) and Raposo (2008) have established connections between Brand Personality or conceptual positioning and core elements of visual identity, including Typography(s), Symbol(s), Color(s), and overall visual style. However, there remains a notable gap in the literature concerning the relationship between Brand Personality and one of the Complementary Elements identified by Wheeler (2018) and Oliveira (2015) as Imagery—referring specifically to the visual characteristics of Photography, Illustration, and Iconography within brand communication. Lupton (2011) acknowledges Imagery as an integral component of a brand’s visual language system and attributes significance to it, her work does not provide empirical evidence or in-depth exploration of its associative potential.

From a pragmatic perspective, communicating a specific mood or concept to a photography professional inevitably involves a degree of interpretation. This exchange entails a dynamic interaction between the intended message and the subject being represented, with the resulting image ultimately shaped by the photographer’s vision and creative decisions. As Barthes (2018) suggests, the photographer’s subjectivity plays a central role in constructing the photograph’s meaning, which emerges from both the intentional and the unintended elements captured. Similarly, Joly (2012) emphasizes that the creation of meaning in an image is not fixed but negotiated between the image-maker’s choices and the viewer’s interpretation.

This is not to diminish the photographer’s authorship—their practice is informed by a range of conceptual and technical variables that contribute significantly to the final composition (Shore 2010). Rather, the objective here is to establish a set of guiding parameters that underscore the value of analyzing imagery at its point of origin. These parameters can assist both in articulating visual expectations to professionals and in curating Imagery from platforms or databases designed to offer content aligned with specific communicative or branding contexts (Wheeler 2018).

This study is proposed as a contribution to academic discourse by fostering a dialogue between Imagery and Brand Language, grounded in logical associations shaped by a defined brand personality or conceptual idea. Such associations enable the structuring and teaching of typological units of meaning within a broader visual communication system. From a practical perspective, the research also offers valuable support for the design process in communication and visual identity design within the professional context. The underlying premise is to provide designers with clear and structured requirements for analyzing and articulating the components of

visual identity and Imagery so that can be identified as an integral part of the branding system and message strategy.

These requirements not only support the creative process but also contribute to the justification and standardization of visual identity systems. In this regard, beyond the Basic Elements of the Brand System such as name, Typography(s), Symbol(s), and Color(s), (Oliveira 2015), Imagery will be posited as an equally significant component—one that requires distinctive attributes aligned with the personality of the brand system and should be incorporated into its visual guidelines. Furthermore, in sectors such as fashion and automotive, Imagery often plays a central role in communication, serving both as a medium for inspiration and as a direct representation of the product.

In such contexts, Imagery emerges as a crucial component in the construction and expression of brand identity. The integration of photography—or other forms of Imagery—as a core element of the visual identity system is particularly significant within certain typologies of brand identity, such as those found in Place Branding, Technology, and Energy sectors. Van Nes (2012) categorizes these as Dynamic Identities, characterized by flexible and adaptive visual systems that evolve over time or across contexts. Within these identity structures, Imagery frequently operates not as a Complementary Element, but as an integral part of the foundational components—alongside Typography(s), Symbol(s), and Name. It often merges with these elements in a fluid and adaptive manner, reinforcing the dynamic nature of the brand. As such, Imagery assumes a central role in the articulation of identity, contributing to both consistency and differentiation within complex and evolving brand environments.

The objectives guiding the development of this study are threefold: (1) to conduct a literature review that establishes a theoretical framework encompassing visual identity systems and the components of brand personality; (2) to explore the integration of some Elements extracted from the Joly's (2012) Image Analysis Model—comprised of three analytical levels: the Perceptual (formal visual aspects such as composition, color, and framing), the Cultural (symbolic and socio-historical codes), and the Interpretative (meaning-making shaped by viewers' subjective and contextual experiences)—as part of a methodological tool for examining how brand Imagery reflects and reinforces Brand Personality; and (3) to apply this integrated analytical framework in a case study focused on the Renault Kwid, enabling a detailed and systematic investigation of the brand's visual strategies.

Joly's Model work as a theoretical and practical base that together with other theorists are the foundational approaches in the visual communication, such as Barthes' (1984) distinction between denotation and connotation, which reveals how seemingly neutral images carry culturally constructed meanings, and Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic sign classification—*icon*, *index*, and *symbol* (Crow 2010), which allows deeper categorization of the representational modes used in branding. These frameworks, together with insights from design theorists such as Wheeler (2018) and Oliveira (2015), support a multidimensional model that connects the understanding of Imagery as a strategic and meaning-making device within brand identity systems with the constructed meanings. By situating brand Imagery within this interdisciplinary theoretical context, the study aims to contribute both to academic research

and to design practice, particularly in defining parameters for the creation and analysis of photographic aesthetics in brand communication.

On the framework below (Fig. 1) illustrates how foundational approaches in visual communication—drawing from theories of Joly (2012), Barthes (1984) and Pierce (as interprets by Crow 2010), are connect to key concepts extracted from brand identity theories such as Wheeler (2018) and Oliveira (2015), in order to develop an interdisciplinary model that aims to connect the strategic brand meaning with culturally construct meanings, offering a broader perspective on how Imagery can expand the brand system by supporting the visual decision-making on the Imagery Element of the brands.

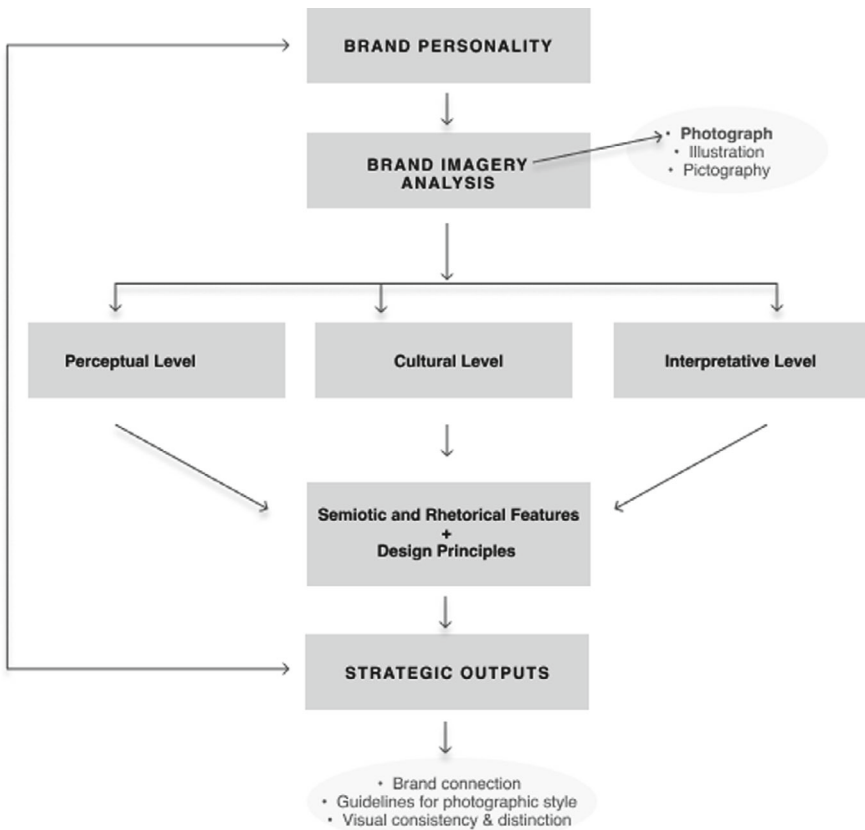


Fig. 1 This framework integrates Joly’s (2012) model of image analysis with semiotic theory and principles design to support the analysis of brand imagery. It connects perceptual, cultural, and interpretative levels of image construction to the strategic expression of brand personality, offering tools for improvement on the Imagery field, focusing on the photography imagery in communication design. Author’s image 2025

2 Methodology

This study adopts qualitative research (Mason 2018), and adopts an exploratory approach (Kumar 2013) aimed at analyzing the role of brand imagery in the construction and expression of brand personality, and it is supported by a literature review about semiotic theory and design research, the methodology is structured around three interrelated phases: literature review, theoretical framework construction, and case study analysis, aimed at synthesizing information in order to draw connections between references (Martin and Hanington 2012), to generate a theoretical framework on the areas of visual identity systems and their relationship with the personality components of a particular brand.

The literature will serve as support for a case study (Muratovski 2016), where the aim is to verify the possibility of integrating elements of reading and image analysis into the branding process in a pragmatic context, where data triangulation is managed in the transition from theory to cases through analysis processed by researchers (Muratovski 2016).

For the development of the case study, online data collection was employed, focusing specifically on the selected brand's official landing page. This approach follows Creswell's (2014) guidance on qualitative research, which emphasizes the use of multiple sources of evidence in case studies to enhance depth and validity. As Creswell (2014) notes, case study research typically draws on various forms of data, including observations, interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials. In this study, the emphasis was placed on visual analysis, using systematically collected visual content—primarily photographic and promotional imagery—as the primary data source. This choice was aligned with the study's objective to explore the role of imagery in brand expression and identity construction.

The selection of the Renault Kwid as the subject of the case study was guided by its positioning within the automotive sector, specifically in the category of popular or entry-level vehicles in the Brazilian market. The analysis focused on the Brazilian landing page of Renault, reflecting a localized perspective on the brand's communication strategy. This geographic and cultural specificity is essential, as interpretations of visual language are deeply influenced by visual culture, which varies across national and regional contexts (Hall 2012; Mirzoeff 2009).

The concept of visual culture acknowledges that the meanings constructed through images are not universal but are mediated by cultural norms, social history, and collective experience. Therefore, the choice of a region-specific platform reinforces the relevance of conducting a context-sensitive analysis of brand imagery, as the visual strategies employed by Renault in Brazil may differ significantly from those used in other markets.

3 Literature Review

While Wheeler (2018) emphasizes the importance of imagery in the construction and communication of brand identity, she does not offer specific analytical parameters that clarify the relationship between brand personality and the visual characteristics of photography. This absence creates a gap in understanding how visual elements—such as composition, mood, and subject matter—can be systematically aligned with the strategic expression of a brand's identity.

Bergström (2008), in contrast, provides a more nuanced view by defining image typologies according to their communicative function, rhetorical intent, and the message being conveyed. These perspectives align closely with foundational concepts from visual culture studies, which explore how images participate in constructing meaning within specific cultural and ideological contexts (Hall 2012; Mirzoeff 2009). Villas Boas (2010) further contributes to this discussion by highlighting visual aspects such as framing, composition, and the aesthetic treatment of subjects as critical to conveying meaning—making them particularly relevant to branding practices that seek to visually express a brand's core attributes or “DNA”.

Given these contributions, this research identifies an opportunity to build upon existing theory by integrating the image analysis model proposed by Joly (2012). Her framework—structured around perceptual, cultural, and interpretative levels—provides a comprehensive approach to examining how meaning is produced through Imagery. Joly's semiotic lens enables a balanced analysis that considers both the formal visual elements and the socio-cultural contexts in which images are interpreted, especially within the domain of advertising. This integration serves as a foundation for the exploratory analysis proposed in this study, which aims to articulate how photographic aesthetics can be systematically aligned with brand personality within visual identity systems.

While brand personality refers to the strategic construction of human-like traits attributed to a brand (Aaker 1997; Mark and Pearson 2003; Martins 1999; Swystun 2022)—formed through communication and public perception—brand positioning ensures that the brand occupies a distinct, strategic space within its competitive landscape (Davis 2006; Elam 2004; Olins 2008). Positioning defines how a brand differentiates itself and establishes a meaningful relationship with its audience.

This strategic brand construction emerges from the alignment of vision, values, and business strategy, grounded in an understanding of consumer needs and expectations (Wheeler 2018). The brand vision serves as both a foundation and a guiding force, and as Wheeler (2018) emphasizes, it must be compelling, expressive, and aligned with the company's long-term objectives. This vision informs the visual and verbal identity system, which communicates the brand's positioning and personality across all touchpoints.

According to Wheeler (2018), the consistency of this system is maintained through a defined set of system elements, including the brand name, graphic mark, typography, color palette, symbols, shapes, tone of voice, and what Oliveira (2015) calls

the “fifth element”—a distinctive visual cue that reinforces recognition and differentiation (Raposo and Oliveira 2021). These components, when coherently articulated, form the foundation of a brand identity system.

This notion of a systemized approach to branding is echoed in the work of Olins (2008), who emphasizes that successful brands are not merely visual artifacts but strategic expressions of an organization’s culture, values, and promise. Olins argues that coherence across all brand expressions—visual, verbal, and experiential—is essential for building trust and long-term equity.

Similarly, Mollerup (2005) advocates for a systematic, design-led approach to identity development, highlighting the role of structure and rules in ensuring consistency while allowing for flexibility and evolution. He emphasizes that brand systems are not fixed templates but adaptable frameworks that evolve with the brand, market, and culture. In this view, brand systems serve both a communicative and organizational function—supporting recognition, differentiation, and internal alignment.

Together, these perspectives underline the importance of viewing brand identity not as a collection of isolated elements, but as an integrated system—strategically designed and consistently applied to express the brand’s positioning and personality across diverse platforms and cultural contexts, and through the proposed research, we aim to integrate the elements of reading and image analysis, as outlined by Joly (2012), to analyze the elements that compose Brand Imagery, relating them to Brand Personality.

Joly (2012) initiates the analysis process by describing the analyzed advertisement, focusing on aspects related to the visual composition of the image. The choice of angle or point of view is also part of the elements analyzed through Joly’s model (2012), as it is determinant and can either reinforce or contradict the sense of reality associated with the photograph (Joly 2012). The point of view, in turn, refers to the position from which the scene was captured, as highlighted by Goliot-Leté et al. (2011).

Another point emphasized by Joly (2012) concerns the Composition or interior geography of the visual message, which is one of the fundamental plastic tools. It plays an essential role in hierarchizing the vision and, therefore, in guiding the reading of the image (Joly 2012). In the field of Composition, Bergström (2008) emphasizes the presence of various principles governing the formation of an image. Among them, he highlights the concept of A&O—Attracting and Orienting, which refers to the ability to attract the viewer’s attention through a dominant element, followed by orientation to other elements in the image. Within this approach, the photographer is encouraged to establish a sequence of reading the image. Within this framework, the author mentions elements such as symmetry and asymmetry, the rule of thirds, contrasts, and balance.

The interpretation of Shapes is also part of the systematic analysis proposed by Joly (2012), as for the author, as with other plastic elements, it is fundamentally influenced by anthropology and culture. Therefore, to understand the shapes organized in a visual message (and to understand the interpretation they evoke), it is necessary to try to disregard their literal meaning and observe them for themselves, attentively.

The element of Color is interpreted anthropologically in Joly's Model (2012), along with Shapes, which we mentioned earlier, and Light/Illumination, which states that lighting has a psychophysiological effect on the viewer (2012).

4 Case Study

During the execution of this case study, an analysis was conducted on the images extracted from the landing page of the Renault Kwid between February 2024 to March of 2025. The first step is capturing the images of the Renault Brazil website thought print screen. The second step is analyzing the Imagery in isolation from the other Elements of the System—Name, Graphic Mark, Typography (Oliveira 2015) as shown in Fig. 2. Then, aspects of the Brand's DNA/Personality that are described, in this the case, it's analyzed the relationship between the brand DNA with the information systematize from the website of the brand, together with the print screens of the Imagery of the Kwid. The third step refers to the Context. And the fourth involves describing and diagnosing with the Elements and its parameters presented in the brand analyzed, always relating them to the Brand's Personality/DNA.

This process can be carried out using a non-linear approach, and the order of the parameters may differ from the one presented here, in some brand systems may not include all Elements or may be neutral in relation to them, but in the case of the Renault is possible the identify all the Elements and apply the parameters of analysis in all the Elements—Context, Color(s), Light. Form and Object, Signs and Styles, Movement, Angles and Point of View and Composition.

The concept of brand DNA refers to the identity characteristics of the brand that determine its expression and language (Magalhães and Oliveira 2023). In the case of the Renault Kwid, it is possible to perceive the synergy between the elements related to the Mission, Vision, and Values of the Renault in its Imagery. A description found on the brand's website defines: "Our Passion, our Brand, our greatest inspiration is our passion. This feeling is present in every product and service we create" regarding their style, they define themselves as an "easylife", "French style" and as well as "focus on developing new technologies to become more competitive, balance and electrify". The Renault Kwid also features slogan which is "Make your day big" and "Find everything in the SUV of compact cars" which is reflected in the choices of the brand's Imagery focusing on design and unique features on its communication.

The next stage of analysis focuses on the parameter of color, which, as Joly (2012) emphasizes, is deeply shaped by anthropological and cultural factors. To fully interpret the role of color in a visual message, one must move beyond its literal or immediate associations and instead engage in a more attentive and culturally contextualized observation. In the case of the Renault Kwid, the chromatic choices stand out as a distinctive feature that sets the brand apart from its competitors.

The Imagery colors go from orange-yellow tones, goes to blue-sky tones until the grey-concrete tones aligns with the strategic positioning of the vehicle, reinforcing

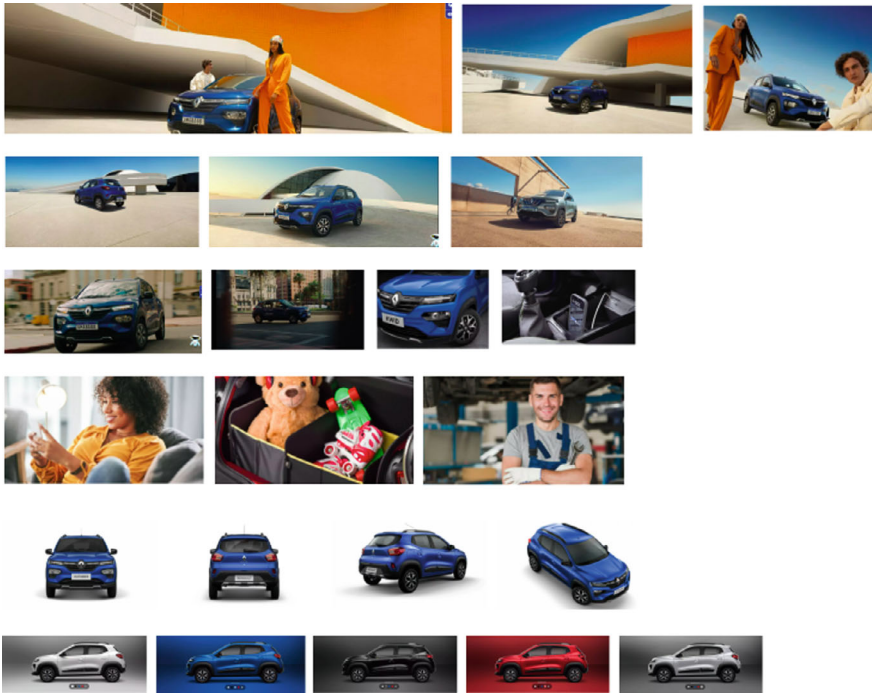


Fig. 2 Synthesis of the imagery of the Renault Kwid, isolated from other components of the brand system communication. *Note* Original images from Neogama—Communication Campaign for Renault Kwid Brazil 2023—<https://www.renault.com.br/>. Author’s archive, 2025

attributes such as design, balance and technology. In such a context, Renault’s color choices operate not only as aesthetic decisions but as semiotic cues, supporting the brand’s differentiation strategy positioning as a compact SUV, using a visual communication that reflects its personality and stands out within the category of popular vehicles.

The third Element analyzed is Light, just like Color, the interpretation of Light/Illumination has an anthropological character, but besides that, Illumination has a psychophysiological effect on the viewer (Joly 2012). In the case of the Renault Kwid, the use of natural light is applied due to the outdoors pictures, where its possible to visualize the sky tones as well.

The fourth Element analyzed is Shapes and Depicted Objects. According to Joly (2012), the interpretation of shapes, like other plastic elements, is fundamentally influenced by anthropological and cultural factors. In the imagery of the Renault Kwid, there is a notable emphasis on outdoor environments; however, these spaces cannot be clearly identified as urban, nor can they be defined as natural. Instead, the prominence of architectural elements and structured forms suggests a setting that foregrounds constructed, designed spaces—highlighting a connection to modernity and design-consciousness.

Within the analysis of shapes, the presence of two individuals—a man and a woman—positioned in a stylized manner can also be observed. These figures, who resemble fashion models, introduce a visual representation of gender duality and inclusivity. Moreover, their aesthetic presentation may allude to French cultural influence, particularly the country's longstanding association with fashion and style, which are integral to Renault's brand values. This subtle visual reference strengthens the brand's identity by linking its imagery to French elegance and sophistication, reinforcing its positioning within both automotive and lifestyle markets.

The fifth Element analyzed addresses the presence of Signs, Styles, and Memes and how they are related to the Brand System Elements and the other analyzed parameters. It is possible to perceive that among the signs and rhetorical elements present, there is an Allusion to the influence on fashion, using models on the Imagery of the car. Additionally, there is also Repetition Metaphor identify but the repetitive use of the imagery of the car itself.

The sixth Element analyzed is Movement and its relationship to the brand's DNA and personality. In the imagery associated with the Renault Kwid, movement is subtly suggested through visual cues that imply the vehicle is situated within an urban, dynamic environment. However, movement does not emerge as the primary communicative focus. Instead, the imagery prioritizes a stylized architectural and fashion-oriented context, suggesting that the brand seeks to position the Kwid not only as a vehicle for mobility but as an accessory to a contemporary, design-conscious lifestyle. This choice reinforces a brand personality that values aesthetics, modernity, and cultural alignment over traditional notions of speed or performance.

The seventh Element analyzed is the Angle of Viewpoint, a critical element in shaping the rhetorical impact of an image. As Joly (2012) notes, the choice of angle can either reinforce or challenge the sense of realism typically associated with the photographic medium. In the imagery of the Renault Kwid, the use of diagonal angles introduces a sense of dynamism and sophistication, aligning with rhetorical strategies that aim to suggest movement, modernity, and aesthetic refinement. From the perspective of visual rhetoric, such compositional choices are not merely technical, but persuasive tools that guide the viewer's interpretation and emotional engagement (Hill and Helmers 2004).

Additionally, the frequent use of low-angle or ground-level shots evokes a sense of magnificence, dominance, and power—rhetorical effects commonly associated with establishing authority or elevating the subject's status (Kress and van Leeuwen 2010). These angles contribute to the construction of a brand personality that is confident, bold, and aspirational.

Moreover, the visual strategy includes the use of wide-angle lenses or long-shot perspectives, which allow the viewer to perceive not only the object (the vehicle) but also its spatial context. This aligns with what Barthes (1984) would describe as a rhetoric of the image—where spatial composition and perspective operate as codes that carry connotative meanings. Here, the sense of openness and integration with the environment supports the narrative of the Renault Kwid as a car that is not only functional but also embedded in a lifestyle-oriented, urban visual discourse. Together,

these visual strategies function to position the vehicle as more than a product—they frame it as an aspirational object within a larger cultural and symbolic system, reinforcing brand values related to design, freedom, and contemporary urban living.

Finally, the eighth and last Element analyzed, Composition, it is relevant to emphasize that this principle aims to synthesize all the Elements present in the Imagery composition and interpret the elements present in the Imagery composition through the analysis parameters, also relating how the Composition of the Brand Imagery is consolidated and relates to the other Elements of the Brand System.

In the case of the Renault Kwid, the imagery—primarily commercial in nature (Bergström 2008), employs compositions that strive for realism, particularly in photographs intended for product presentation. While certain conceptual images exhibit mild distortion, likely resulting from the use of wide-angle or specialty lenses, this appears to be a deliberate stylistic choice aligned with the brand's visual language. In other images, the use of zoom and cropping serves to highlight specific design details of the vehicle, directing the viewer's attention to key features. This visual strategy reinforces a sense of clarity and pragmatic communication, supporting the primary commercial goal of informing and persuading the consumer in a way that feels natural and accessible car, such as a popular vehicle. When the visual elements are examined in relation to the brand's DNA and the parameters outlined in the broader imagery analysis framework, a clear alignment emerges. The Renault Kwid's Imagery reflects its urban positioning, marked by a minimalist visual approach, subtle references to French cultural influence, and a design language that suggests technological sophistication.

The photographic choices—encompassing composition, focus, lens selection, and spatial framing—play a key role in shaping a cohesive brand narrative that merges functionality with style. These visual decisions reinforce Renault's positioning within the compact SUV segment of the popular vehicle market. Additionally, in another commercial visual application, the predominance of photography within the brand's communication strategy becomes clear, further emphasizing its importance as a core component of the brand's visual identity system as the picture below (Fig. 3).

5 Conclusion

The analysis conducted throughout this study demonstrates the feasibility and relevance of integrating image reading and analysis frameworks into the interpretation of brand language, particularly within the automotive sector. The findings highlight the importance of aligning brand Imagery with both the product's characteristics and the brand's personality, reinforcing the strategic role that visual elements play in constructing a coherent and persuasive brand identity. At the same time, it was observed that imagery is often employed to emphasize product attributes, which may not always directly reflect the deeper dimensions of brand personality. Nonetheless, in



Fig. 3 In another visual commercial application of the brand, the predominance of photography in its visual communication is evident, reinforcing its significance within the overall brand system. *Note* Original images from Neogama—Communication Campaign for Renault Kwid Brazil 2023—<https://euorenault.com.br/franca/>. Author’s archive, 2025

the case of the Renault Kwid, several meaningful connections between brand personality and visual representation were identified, supporting the central argument of this research.

Anchored in a qualitative approach, this study probes to be promising as it seeks to converge information from various sources, following established precepts in the specialized literature. The literature review enabled the consolidation of key concepts related to Visual Identity Systems and their association with the personality components of a particular brand, as well as guiding codes for the Imagery which seems to be a significant element in the brand systems, especially in businesses where visual communication is strongly supported by imagery, such as the automotive sector addressed here.

The decision to utilize online systematized data collection—focusing on visual materials from the brand’s official Brazilian landing page—proved effective in enabling a comprehensive and context analysis. This approach validated the potential of applying image reading methodologies from the semiotic field in the branding

process and confirmed that Imagery can function as a strategic tool, not only for product representation but also for expressing brand values, personality traits, and cultural positioning.

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