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CULTURAL INTERTEXTUALITY IN CONTEMPORARY YOUTH FOOD PACKAGING

The purpose of this research is to develop an innovative strategy for applying cultural intertextuality in contemporary youth-oriented food packaging, in response to modern consumption's expectations for rapid legibility, social shareability, brand coherence, and cultural respect. This paper constructs a conceptual framework through literature synthesis and cross-case visual analysis. The framework establishes an analytical vocabulary and a set of design heuristics for discussing—and guiding—the responsible use of cultural references in both the creation and evaluation of youth-oriented packaging.

This research culminates in an integrated design strategy tailored to cultural intertextuality in youth food packaging. Moving beyond simple symbolic borrowing, it proposes an information-first layout logic that prioritizes a stable core information structure and then introduces intertextual cultural references to balance clarity with cultural meaning. The paper further explains how layout order and intertextual resources can be coordinated to strengthen recognizability and shareability, and it articulates heuristic prompts for design review (e.g., rapid recognition, quotability for social sharing, and cultural provenance) as discussion-oriented criteria rather than experimentally validated metrics.

Overall, this study presents a multi-component framework that links principles of visual communication with ethically oriented referencing principles, emphasizing communication efficiency while supporting responsible cultural borrowing in both design development and critique.

Key words: *Packaging design, cultural intertextuality, youth consumption, layout and hierarchy, typography and color, social media dissemination, ethics and compliance.*

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СУЧАСНА КУЛЬТУРНА ІНТЕРТЕКСТУАЛЬНІСТЬ У ХАРЧОВОМУ ПАКУВАННІ ДЛЯ МОЛОДІ

Метою цього дослідження є розроблення інноваційної стратегії застосування культурної Інтертекстуальності в сучасному молодіжно орієнтованому пакуванні харчових продуктів у відповідь на очікування сучасного споживання щодо швидкої читабельності, соціальної поширюваності, узгодженості бренду та культурної поваги. У статті вибудовується концептуальна рамка на основі синтезу релевантної літератури та міжвипадкового (cross-case) візуального аналізу. Рамка формує аналітичний словник і набір дизайн-евристик для обговорення – практичного спрямування – відповідального використання культурних посилань як у створенні, так і в оцінюванні молодіжно орієнтованого пакування.

Дослідження завершується інтегрованою дизайн-стратегією, спеціально адаптованою до культурної інтертекстуальності в молодіжному харчовому пакуванні. Виходячи за межі простого символічного запозичення,

вона пропонує інформаційно-орієнтовану логіку верстки, яка спершу пріоритезує стабільну структуру ядра інформації, а далі вводить інтертекстуальні культурні посилання, щоб збалансувати ясність із культурним значенням. Стаття також пояснює, як порядок верстки та інтертекстуальні ресурси можуть бути скоординовані для посилення впізнаваності й поширюваності, і формулює евристичні підказки для дизайн-огляду (наприклад, швидке впізнавання, «цитованість» для соціального поширення та простежуваність культурного походження) як критерії, орієнтовані на дискусію, а не як експериментально валідовані метрики.

Загалом дослідження пропонує багатокомпонентну рамку, що поєднує принципи візуальної комунікації з етично орієнтованими принципами референціювання, підкреслюючи комунікаційну ефективність і водночас підтримуючи відповідальне культурне запозичення як у процесі розроблення дизайну, так і в його критичному аналізі.

Ключові слова: *дизайн упаковки, культурна інтертекстуальність, молодіжне споживання, верстка та ієрархія, типографіка й колір, поширення в соціальних медіа, етика та дотримання вимог.*

Statement of the problem. Packaging has traditionally been treated as a bridge between production and consumption, valued mainly for its protective and informational functions. Today, however, young people live in image-led environments shaped by mobile video and social platforms. Packaging is no longer just a wrapper on the shelf; it is increasingly read and shared as a visual interface that can cue recognition and shape attitudes (Underwood, 2003).

In this paper, the term memetic visual grammar refers to the internal organization of a package that makes certain elements easy to take away, quote, and recombine. The grammar is described through four dimensions – graphic elements, layout structure, typographic form, and color relations – and it is grounded in practical design controls such as contour clarity, hierarchy, and stylistic consistency. The interest here is not ornament for its own sake, but how these controls produce repeatable, retellable units in everyday circulation (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

The broader design-historical shift – from modernist legibility to postmodern citation, and now to hybrid, platform-facing visual styles – creates a concrete problem for youth-oriented packaging. Designers must keep the identification skeleton stable (notably type systems and primary color relations) while allowing intertextual elements to vary in controlled ways. If that balance fails, the result is easy to predict: recognition weakens, and variation turns into noise or style drift (Meggs & Purvis, 2016; Poynor, 2003; Lupton, 2010).

Research analysis. Recent work increasingly treats packaging as a repeatable identity system that has to hold together across shelves and screens. In this framing, hierarchy and information structure are not decorative choices; they are what keep brand cues readable and comparable from one encounter to the next (Spence & Van Doorn, 2022). Visual complexity is therefore best handled as a controlled variable: its effects depend on how information is arranged and on viewing conditions, which is why piling on surface elements often backfires (Baek et al., 2023). At the other end of the spectrum, simplicity is not automat-

ically “empty”. Simpler packages are frequently read as more authentic and reliable and can raise willingness to pay in consumable categories (Wang et al., 2023; Ton et al., 2024). For youth-oriented food packaging, these findings point to a basic requirement: intertextual play can expand, but it needs a stable informational core; otherwise, cultural cues compete with identification cues and recognizability suffers.

Color and typography sit at the center of that core because they carry meaning and operate as high-leverage recognition cues. Reviews show that color guides consumer inferences in relatively stable ways, and that primary – secondary color relations can keep semantic continuity across SKUs (Steiner & Florack, 2023). Category studies likewise show that color shapes expectations and preference formation – for example, in specialty coffee – supporting the role of stable color relations in recognition consistency (Carvalho et al., 2025). Work on color-typeface congruence adds that coordinated core cues tend to improve perceived fit and evaluation (Tian & Huang, 2025). Typography itself can function as a shared cultural cue: retro typefaces may activate historical memory and shift related perceptions (Kulczynski & Hook, 2024). These strands justify the distinction used in this paper between core identifying information (brand name, category cues, primary color relations, primary type system) and modular expressive elements (icons, short phrases, localized motifs) that are better suited to controlled intertextual variation.

Recent portfolio research reinforces the same logic at the system level. Objective measures of portfolio cohesion suggest that “standing out while still looking like the family” can be managed and assessed (Ward et al., 2024). Online research on eco-label complexity points to a similar practical lesson: “simpler” is not always better; what matters is whether complexity remains readable and interpretable under actual viewing conditions (Donato & Adıgüzel, 2022). Finally, studies on formal cues (e.g., symmetry and curvature) show that meaning depends on relations among features rather than isolated elements (Romeo-Arroyo et al., 2023), while work on minimalism warns that

“less” works only when it fits positioning and category conventions (Favier et al., 2019). Research on creative packaging reaches a parallel conclusion: creativity can support motivation and decision-making only when designs remain processable and structurally coherent (Shukla et al., 2022). Taken together, the literature supports this paper’s core proposition: intertextuality functions optimally when organized as a designed relationship between a stable informational core and a modular layer of cultural referencing.

Purpose of the article. This study aims to trace how youth-oriented food packaging shifts from modernist order to postmodern intertextuality and, further, to contemporary juxtaposition and hybridity; and to develop a cross-case analytical framework for cultural referencing in youth food packaging by comparing representative cases across four visual dimensions – graphic elements, layout structure, typographic form, and color relations – so as to articulate a division between core identifying information and modular intertextual elements and to propose a proportioning guideline for preventing symbolic hollowing and style drift.

Materials and methods. This paper follows a conceptual, case-informed design analysis. Cases were selected for visibility in contemporary retail or digital circulation, for the availability of verifiable sources, and for clear intertextual moves (e.g., quotation, parody, juxtaposition, hybrid styling). The study combines literature synthesis with cross-case visual comparison. Each case was documented and coded along four dimensions – graphic elements, layout structure, typographic form, and color relations – using the same steps: descriptive inventory, hierarchy mapping (core vs. secondary layers), cross-case comparison, and principle extraction. The output is an analytical vocabulary and heuristic prompts for design review rather than experimentally validated metrics.

Presenting main material. In packaging design, modernism converts aesthetic order into repeatable layout rules, enhancing readability and clarity. Clear rows and columns create predictable reading paths, and explicit hierarchy directs attention to core information. Adequate whitespace allows key messages to stand out, supporting industrial printing, shelving, and rapid shelf selection. Typographic and compositional hierarchy foregrounds brand identifiers (Müller-Brockmann, 2007; Lupton, 2010; Meggs & Purvis, 2016). MUJI’s snack range illustrates a two-column grid, a fixed typographic ladder (Fig. 1), and generous whitespace, forming a stable visual skeleton for effective reading (Kwok, 2023).



Fig. 1. MUJI snack packaging using a two-column grid, a fixed typographic ladder, and ample whitespace (Kwok, 2023)

This order is not mere formalism but an attention-focused design. High-contrast, prominent messages stand out immediately, while smaller, less dense text recedes, reducing decoding effort and misreading. A stable skeleton also allows controlled variation: subtle shifts in graphics or color are read as rhythm rather than disorder. Such flexibility underpins later intertextual, collage, or juxtaposed expressions (Heller & Vienne, 2012; Meggs & Purvis, 2016). Chobani’s 2017 redesign replaced high-contrast photography with softer primaries, hand-drawn fruit illustrations, and a new typographic system, clarifying the visual hierarchy (Fig. 2). Prior research confirms that a clear information hierarchy and reduced visual density improve legibility and the identification of key brand and category cues (Pieters & Wedel, 2004). Visual simplicity and order are often interpreted as signals of quality and reliability, strengthening brand impressions and purchase preferences (Silayoi & Speece, 2007; Orth & Malkewitz, 2008). A restrained, consistent primary palette further functions as a stable recognition anchor, supporting family resemblance and mnemonic consistency across product iterations (Ampuero & Vila, 2006; Labrecque & Milne, 2012).



Fig. 2. Chobani yogurt rebrand with hand-drawn fruit and new typography (Collins, 2023)

Modernism does not reject ornament but applies it conditionally. Core brand colors and headline typefaces remain consistent, while textures, illustrations, or badges can vary across batches without disrupting reading order. This explains why many brands use a master template for seasonal, co-branded, or limited-edition products: the skeleton preserves identity, while variation adds freshness (Müller-Brockmann, 2007; Lupton, 2010). In youth markets, restrained palettes and clear hierarchy are easier to read than stacked elements; consistent colors and headline positions allow different flavors or themes to appear as one family, and size ladders and spacing ensure key information is legible on small screens.

Modernism thus establishes a readable skeleton for typography, organized information, and rhythm through whitespace. These clear parameters signal authenticity, restraint, and professionalism to young consumers. With a structured base, mild misalignments, intertextual borrowings, and stylistic juxtapositions are read as deliberate rhythm rather than disorder, enabling the transition to contemporary, meme-ready expression.

As symbolic density grows in consumer culture, single-track functional messages lose attention. Post-modern packaging uses intertextuality and parody to allow multiple readings, combining urban, popular, and historical cues. This is not mere element stacking but context re-encoding: badge-like icons, adapted taglines, and historical motifs are reorganized hierarchically to support recognition and quotability. Buddyrich Coffee (iF Gold Award) exemplifies this, mixing Chinese and Roman fonts with illustrations to create a hybrid, engaging brand identity for youth (Fig. 3) (D&AD, 2024).



Fig. 3. Juxtaposition and hybridity in practice: BuddyRich Coffee packaging (D&AD, 2024)

The theoretical basis of this strategy draws from architectural and visual-culture criticism. “Learning from the everyday” suggests absorbing visual vocabularies from signage, commercial decoration, and popular imagery, then recomposing them within new orders. Meaning depends on context rather than abstract rules, making vernacular symbols usable and giving ordinary shapes and slogans persuasive force through scale and material (Venturi et al., 1977). Post-

modern design criticism highlights that contemporary graphics manage difference and polysemy: relaxed rules do not imply disorder; intertextuality is guided by hierarchy and contrast to remain readable, legible, and quotable (Poynor, 2003).

From a semiotic view, intertextuality and parody work by rearranging the signifier and the signified. Photographs, textures, letterforms, and colors gain new emphasis and adjacency in layouts, producing fresh connotations. Retro typefaces can activate historical memory, faux-vintage fibers carry ecological metaphors, and local motifs become contemporary identity markers. Meaning emerges from adjacency, contrast, whitespace, and scale networks, not isolated elements (Barthes, 1977; Eco, 1976). Youth subcultures are adept at recontextualization: through appropriation, displacement, and parody, mainstream symbols enter new discursive spaces, producing familiar yet slightly altered forms that invite participation and remix. Portable visual-verbal units, such as badge-like icons and short phrases, can circulate independently while the master template maintains brand identity (Hebdige, 1979; Underwood, 2003; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

Nostalgia also supports postmodern intertextuality. It is a rewriting of past vocabularies at a contemporary scale and material, not restoration. Tony’s Chocolonely uses slab-serif cues and paper fiber textures with color blocking to evoke no nostalgia while maintaining clear reading paths. Classic silhouettes, aged textures, and period palettes reinforce visual communication but should be placed to avoid occluding brand identifiers (Guffey, 2006; Boym, 2001; Meggs & Purvis, 2016).



Fig. 4. Tony’s Chocolonely bars –Nostalgic cues rewritten through proportion, material, and color blocking (Bittermann, 2019)

Discussion. Intertextuality and parody in youth-oriented packaging require careful management to avoid visual clutter and symbolic hollowing. Effective design depends on maintaining order, hierarchy, and consistent treatment of cited objects. Built

upon this modernist skeleton, postmodern packaging enables instant brand recognition and the circulation of portable visual-verbal units in youth markets. Integrated into grids, typographic ladders, and primary color relations, intertextual elements are read as evidence rather than noise.

Postmodern design opens packaging to social contexts: urban signage, popular imagery, and historical motifs become operational visual resources, hierarchically arranged to preserve recognition while enabling portable, shareable forms. Controlled order ensures that intertextuality enhances rather than distracts. Memeticization relies on repeated use of family-type systems, stable primary colors, and portable visual units to consolidate recognition – a function well documented in prior research.

Boundary control addresses two recurring risks: incomplete re-encoding, which degrades intertextuality into element piling, and excessive openness that erodes core identity. Restoring typographic continuity, color relations, and grid logic mitigates these risks (Müller-Brockmann, 2007; Lupton, 2010; Wheeler, 2017). Ethics and provenance are crucial: in youth markets, unauthorized citation is quickly noticed. Verification and attribution should be integrated into the design process, with layout templates, type scales, color proportions, and icon/tone-of-voice sheets ensuring repeatable, controllable production (Wheeler, 2017; Orth & Malkewitz, 2008).

Sociocultural references, dissemination paths, and boundary control form a closed loop: shareable resources are converted into retellable units and reintegrated into a coherent style family, supporting participation while safeguarding brand continuity (Underwood, 2003; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). This framework highlights that the effectiveness of intertextual strategies depends on a stable informa-

tional core and modular, replaceable cultural references, rather than on sheer quantity of symbols or decorative accumulation.

Conclusion. This study advances the understanding of cultural intertextuality in youth-oriented food packaging by conceptualizing it as a design problem rather than a stylistic accumulation of symbols. Analysis across multiple cases demonstrates that effective intertextual strategies depend on a stable core of identifying information – brand name, category cues, primary colors, and primary typography – around which modular, replaceable cultural references can be organized. Such a structured hierarchy enables packaging to remain legible, recognizable, and shareable while supporting cultural resonance and narrative potential.

The research contributes both conceptually and operationally. Conceptually, it frames intertextuality as a manageable system linking information hierarchy, visual form, and cultural references. Operationally, it proposes a workflow and proportion-control logic: stabilize the core first, introduce intertextual elements in modular layers, and embed provenance and attribution into visual organization. This approach balances novelty and familiarity, supports brand continuity across product lines and iterations, and guides responsible cultural borrowing.

Finally, the study clarifies the risks of unregulated intertextuality – particularly symbolic hollowing and style drift – and their impact on brand cohesion across SKUs and channels. By integrating hierarchical control, modular design, and ethical referencing, these risks can be mitigated. Overall, this work provides structured analytical vocabulary and heuristic prompts to inform both design practice and critical discussion, demonstrating that youth-oriented packaging can achieve contemporary, meme-ready expression without compromising legibility, recognition, or brand integrity.

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