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From Brand Promise to Fulfilment Evidence: A Promise–Proof Perspective on Digital Integrated Marketing Communication in a Malaysian Gifting SME

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Abstract Online gifting is an experience-based category in which emotionally persuasive communication can increase expectations about product quality, delivery reliability and service performance. This exploratory qualitative case study examines how corporate identity and digital integrated marketing communication (IMC) communicate the brand promise of BloomThis MY, a Malaysian digital-first gifting small and medium-sized enterprise (SME), and how fulfilment evidence is made visible and integrated within its digital communication environment. Documentary analysis of five selected product pages, corporate and delivery pages, and 50 customer reviews collected between May and August 2026 was conducted using thematic analysis. Findings indicate that BloomThis foregrounds emotional and visual messaging, while product-level evidence such as dimensions, composition, lifespan and size or variant information is generally available directly on the selected product pages. General substitution conditions are located separately in the website's Terms and Conditions, requiring additional navigation from the product page. Customer-generated reviews provide an additional layer of evidence through which brand promises may be reinforced, qualified or challenged. The findings suggest a potential promise–proof gap, defined as a possible misalignment between expectations generated by brand communication and the visibility, accessibility and contextual integration of supporting fulfilment evidence. The study proposes the promise–proof perspective as a conceptual extension for future empirical testing and highlights the importance of integrating brand promises with fulfilment evidence and customer experience in digital IMC. Implications are offered for evidence-led, transparent and ethically responsible communication in experience-based SMEs.

Index Terms promise–proof gap; corporate identity; integrated marketing communication; fulfilment evidence; credibility cues; eWOM; SMEs; Malaysia; online gifting

I. Introduction

Digitalisation has changed how organisations express corporate identity, construct brand meaning and engage stakeholders. Consumers now encounter organisations through interconnected touchpoints, including websites, product pages, online reviews, customer-service channels and post-purchase communication. Corporate identity is therefore communicated in an environment where organisational messages coexist with consumer-generated information and actual service experiences [1], [2]. Consequently, brand interpretation depends not only on what an organisation says about itself but also on what consumers can observe, access or reasonably infer about the extent to which its claims are supported.

This issue is particularly relevant to experience-based businesses. Online florists and gifting companies sell products that function as symbolic expressions of love, appreciation, apology, sympathy and celebration. Emotional communication can help differentiate these brands by linking their products to feelings, interpersonal relationships and meaningful occasions. At the same time, emotionally meaningful purchases create practical expectations concerning product quality, delivery reliability, freshness, appearance and service. For perishable products and occasion-sensitive deliveries, fulfilment failures may become particularly salient because the timing, reliability, and condition of delivery contribute directly to the meaning of the purchase.

Online purchasing also creates an evidential challenge. Consumers typically encounter digital representations of products and services before experiencing the corresponding physical product or service. They may therefore seek evidence concerning whether a product will correspond reasonably with its representation, whether flowers will arrive fresh, when a delivery will occur, how substitutions are handled and what happens when fulfilment problems arise. Such evidence may appear in organisation-controlled sources, including product information, delivery conditions and service policies, as

well as in consumer-generated sources such as reviews, photographs and post-purchase discussions. Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) is therefore relevant not only after consumption but also when subsequent consumers evaluate the brand [3].

Several established literatures address related relationships between communication, expectations and performance. The services gap model identifies discrepancies between external communication and service delivery [4]. Promise-based accounts emphasise that service organisations must make, enable and keep promises [5]. Expectation-disconfirmation theory explains how performance relative to expectations shapes evaluation [6], while research on greenwashing and CSR credibility examines discrepancies between claims and practices [7]. These perspectives primarily address promise fulfilment, the consequences of expectations, or discrepancies between claims and actual practices. They provide less direct insight into a preceding communicative condition: whether evidence supporting the fulfilment of a promise is sufficiently visible and accessible when consumers encounter the promise and begin forming expectations.

IMC scholarship similarly emphasises the coordination of stakeholders, content and channels [8], [9]. Yet the presence of multiple channels does not necessarily mean that brand promises, operational information and customer experience are integrated. A brand may communicate consistently across channels while relevant fulfilment evidence remains less prominent, is dispersed across separate touchpoints or is only weakly connected to the original promise.

This article addresses that conceptual space through the promise–proof gap, defined here as the potential misalignment between expectations generated by brand communication and the visibility, accessibility and contextual integration of evidence supporting those expectations. The concept is analytical rather than mathematical and does not assume inadequate underlying service performance. The issue may instead concern how supporting evidence is communicated, where it is located and how consumers encounter it across the customer journey. Operational information, such as realistic product representations, dimensions, delivery conditions, substitution policies and service responses, may therefore function not merely as practical detail but also as evidence relevant to brand credibility.

The problem has particular relevance for digital SMEs. These firms often compete through distinctive brand identities and digitally mediated customer relationships while working under resource and capability constraints. In Malaysia, e-commerce has become increasingly embedded in business activity, with e-commerce transaction income reaching RM1,288.1 billion in 2024 and 74.4% of establishments reporting a web presence [10]. At the same time, SMEs continue to face barriers to deeper digitalisation, including skills and financing constraints [11], [12]. Integrating brand communication with operational information and consumer-generated evidence may therefore represent an important yet comparatively under-examined dimension of digital IMC.

BloomThis MY provides an appropriate instrumental case. Founded in 2015, the company is a Malaysian online florist and gifting business that offers flowers, plants and gifts for different occasions and frames its brand purpose around creating "moments of happiness" [13]. Its digital environment brings together emotional and aesthetic brand positioning, product information, delivery communication and customer-generated content. BloomThis also communicates broader social and environmental values, including inclusivity, diversity, innovation and sustainability-related practices [13]. The case therefore brings together emotional identity, functional communication, service information and broader corporate claims within a digital gifting environment.

The study aims to examine how corporate identity and digital IMC communicate emotional and functional brand promises and how visible the evidence of their fulfilment is. It adopts an exploratory, qualitative single-case design based on documentary analysis of website pages and customer reviews collected between May and August 2026. The study does not directly measure consumer trust, satisfaction or attitudes. Instead, it examines how the digital communication environment may shape consumer expectations and makes evidence of fulfilment visible in ways that are relevant to the credibility of brand promises.

The overarching research question is:

How do corporate identity, digital IMC and fulfilment evidence relate to the credibility of brand promises in a Malaysian digital gifting SME?

Five sub-questions guide the analysis:

RQ1: How is BloomThis MY's corporate identity represented across its digital communication environment?

RQ2: What emotional, functional and credibility-oriented communication strategies are evident in BloomThis MY's digital IMC?

RQ3: How does consumer-generated communication relate to the interpretation of the BloomThis brand promise?

RQ4: What potential promise–proof gaps emerge between the brand's communication and the evidence available to consumers?

RQ5: What implications do the findings have for evidence-led and ethically responsible digital IMC in experience-based SMEs?

The study makes three contributions. First, it extends digital IMC scholarship beyond message consistency and channel coordination by proposing a promise–proof perspective that links brand promises, fulfilment evidence and customer experience. Second, it contributes to corporate identity research by positioning fulfilment evidence and consumer-generated communication within the process through which an identity-based promise may be interpreted by stakeholders. Third, it provides exploratory implications for experience-based SMEs seeking to combine emotional distinctiveness with transparent, evidence-led and ethically responsible communication.

II. Literature Review

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A. Corporate Identity, Image and Digital Communication

Corporate identity concerns how an organisation defines and communicates what it represents, including its values, personality, strategic positioning and modes of communication. Balmer and Gray [14] position identity as a strategic resource through which organisations can differentiate themselves and communicate distinctive organisational meaning. Corporate image, by contrast, concerns stakeholder perceptions and associations. Hatch and Schultz [15] emphasise the dynamic relationship between identity and image: organisations can shape intended representations, but they cannot fully control how stakeholders interpret them.

Digitalisation makes the relationship more complex because stakeholders interpret organisational identities through communication encountered across multiple interconnected platforms. Consumers can access organisational communication alongside reviews, comments and other consumer-generated information. Corporate image may therefore reflect the interaction among intended organisational communication, customer experience and publicly accessible supporting evidence. This distinction provides a foundation for the present study: organisational identity and stakeholder interpretation are related but not identical.

B. Integrated Marketing Communication

IMC concerns the coordination of communication across stakeholders, content and channels. Duncan and Moriarty [8] emphasise integrated communication as a basis for stakeholder relationship management, while Kliatchko [9] conceptualises IMC through stakeholders, content, channels and results. In digital environments, organisations communicate through owned and paid media while also engaging with an information environment that contains earned media and consumer-generated communication.

The use of multiple communication channels does not guarantee meaningful integration across those channels. The relevant issue is whether communication collectively supports a coherent value proposition and whether different touchpoints provide information consistent with the expectations created earlier in the customer journey. Previous research has indicated the broader relevance of IMC to the performance of SMEs [16], but performance-oriented research does not fully explain how operational evidence supports the credibility of a specific emotional brand promise. This study therefore extends attention from the coordination of messages and channels towards the coordination of messages, evidence and experience.

C. Emotional Branding and Symbolic Consumption

Gift-giving communicates interpersonal meanings, including affection, appreciation, apology and celebration [17]. The value of a gift therefore extends beyond its functional characteristics to the symbolic meaning of the exchange. Emotional branding builds on such symbolic dimensions by associating brands with feelings, identities and experiences, while emotional attachment can support consumer-brand relationships [18].

Emotional communication may also shape expectations about the wider experience. When a product is presented as beautiful, premium, meaningful or carefully crafted, consumers may infer expectations about quality, presentation, delivery and service. The relevant question is therefore not simply whether emotional branding is desirable, but how the emotional meanings it creates are supported by evidence concerning practical fulfilment.

D. Customer Experience and the Digital Customer Journey

Customer experience develops through interactions with multiple touchpoints across the customer journey [2]. In online gifting, this journey may extend from recognising an occasion and discovering suitable products through evaluation, purchase, delivery, receipt and post-purchase communication. Table 1 maps these stages to illustrative consumer concerns and the types of evidence that may address them.

Table 1: Customer Journey Stages, Consumer Concerns and Potential Evidence

Stage	Illustrative consumer concern	Illustrative evidence
Awareness	What does this brand represent?	Brand narrative, values statements
Discovery	Is the brand relevant to my occasion?	Occasion-based collections, search results
Evaluation	Is the product suitable for my needs?	Product descriptions, dimensions, realistic imagery
Purchase	What will I actually receive?	Variation and substitution information
Delivery	When and under what conditions will it arrive?	Delivery terms, tracking, notifications
Receipt	Does the product match expectations?	Customer photographs, reviews
Post-purchase	What happens if something goes wrong?	Service-recovery policies, response examples
Advocacy	Would I share my experience or recommend the brand?	Reviews, tagged posts, recommendations

Note: The evidence column is conceptual and illustrative; it is not derived from the case materials.

This perspective broadens the meaning of brand communication. Product descriptions, delivery information, service responses and post-purchase communication can each influence how a brand is understood and evaluated. Operational information is therefore not separate from branding; it may function as evidence through which brand promises are interpreted. The customer journey provides the conceptual bridge between IMC and the promise–proof perspective.

E. eWOM and Consumer-Generated Communication

eWOM provides consumers with information beyond organisation-controlled communication. Hennig-Thurau et al. [19] identify online opinion platforms as important environments in which consumers generate and exchange information, while Cheung and Thadani [3] highlight the role of eWOM in online decision-making.

Consumer-generated communication may reinforce organisational meanings, provide evidence of product and service

experiences, or introduce interpretations that differ from the corporate narrative. It should therefore not be treated only as an outcome of marketing communication. It also forms part of the wider information environment through which subsequent consumers encounter, evaluate and interpret brand promises. This study consequently treats customer reviews as an additional layer of evidence surrounding organisational communication.

F. Brand Promises, Credibility and the Promise–Proof Gap

Several perspectives examine the relationship between what organisations promise and what they deliver. The services gap model identifies discrepancies between external communication and service delivery [4], while promise-based accounts emphasise making, enabling and keeping promises [5]. Expectation-disconfirmation theory explains how performance relative to prior expectations affects evaluation [6], and greenwashing research examines discrepancies between claims and practice [7].

Related branding and marketing-communication research provides a closer connection to the role of supporting evidence. Batra and Keller [20] discuss the importance of providing consumers with credible evidence that substantiates brand claims, described as "reasons to believe," including objective testing, endorsements, testimonials and published reviews. Cambier and Poncin [21] similarly examine transparency in marketing communication as a signalling mechanism through which consumers infer brand integrity; their work indicates that transparency signals can contribute to perceptions of such integrity. These perspectives establish that brand claims may require supporting evidence and that such evidence can function as a credibility signal. However, these perspectives do not, by themselves, distinguish between the existence of supporting evidence and its visibility, accessibility or contextual connection to a specific promise at the point of evaluation.

Signalling theory provides a further theoretical basis for this distinction. In online commerce, information asymmetry arises because consumers cannot physically evaluate product quality or readily assess seller characteristics before purchase; website signals can therefore communicate qualities that would otherwise be difficult to observe [22]. Related research also shows that online reviews can provide product-quality information and reduce information asymmetry [23]. These studies demonstrate the importance of observable information in reducing uncertainty. Their primary concern, however, is the function and effectiveness of signals or information disclosure, rather than the relationship between a brand-generated expectation and the location, accessibility, and integration of the evidence supporting it.

This issue is particularly relevant to experience-based digital commerce, where consumers may be unable to fully assess attributes such as quality, condition, delivery reliability or correspondence between online representation and physical receipt before purchase. Information disclosure can reduce uncertainty, but information that is technically available may nevertheless be less salient as evidence when it is located elsewhere in the digital environment or is not directly connected to the claim that generated the expectation.

These distinctions identify a conceptual space between promise and performance, and between information disclosure and credibility. The literature reviewed here explains promise-keeping, expectation evaluation, claim substantiation, signalling and information disclosure. It gives less direct attention to the intermediate communicative condition in which an organisation creates an expectation and consumers encounter supporting evidence that differs in its visibility, accessibility or contextual integration with that expectation. The present study conceptualises this potential communicative misalignment as the promise–proof gap. The construct is therefore not proposed as a replacement for existing theories of promise fulfilment, signalling, transparency or credibility, but as a complementary lens for examining how fulfilment evidence is positioned within the digital customer journey.

G. Authenticity, Transparency and Trust

Authenticity research emphasises the importance of perceived genuineness, credibility and consistency between brand representation and practice [24]. Signalling theory similarly explains why observable cues matter when consumers cannot directly assess quality before purchase [25], [26]. In online shopping, trust-related beliefs also influence willingness to transact [27].

In a digital gifting context, realistic imagery, dimensions, variation information, delivery expectations, customer reviews and service responses can function as observable evidence. Such cues do not replace emotional communication; instead, they may help consumers assess whether the brand can credibly deliver the experience it promises.

Transparency also has an ethical dimension. Clear information, authentic review practices and truthful representation can strengthen the integrity of digital communication, whereas misleading or selectively presented evidence may weaken credibility. The present study therefore treats transparency and responsible technology as implications of the promise–proof perspective rather than as empirically measured outcomes.

H. Synthesis

The literatures reviewed explain how organisations construct identity, coordinate communication, create emotional meaning, manage customer journeys and encounter consumer-generated information. A comparatively less developed issue concerns the relationship between expectations created by brand communication and the visibility, accessibility and integration of evidence supporting their fulfilment. Table 2 relates the principal literature streams to the research questions and identifies the corresponding issues that remain underexplored.

The reviewed literature therefore provides a foundation for examining whether digital IMC can be understood not only as the coordination of stakeholders, messages and channels, but also as the coordination of brand promises, fulfilment evidence and customer experience.

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Table 2: Literature Streams, Contributions, Gaps and Linked Research Questions

Literature stream	What it explains	What remains underexplored	Linked RQ
Corporate identity and image	How identity is expressed and interpreted	Role of fulfilment evidence in image formation	RQ1
IMC	Coordination of messages and channels	Integration of messages, evidence and experience	RQ2
Emotional branding	Symbolic value and differentiation	How emotional expectations are substantiated	RQ2
Customer journey and eWOM	Touchpoints and consumer-generated information	Evidence environment as part of brand interpretation	RQ3
Promise, authenticity and trust	Promise-keeping, signals and credibility	Visibility of evidence before and during purchase	RQ4
Transparency and ethical technology	Responsible, transparent digital practice	Application to evidence-led SME communication	RQ5

III. Conceptual Framework

A. Promise–Proof IMC Framework

Building on Section II, the study proposes a Promise–Proof IMC Framework (Figure 1). The framework extends conventional IMC perspectives by focusing on the relationship between communicated expectations and visible evidence of fulfilment. It serves as the guiding analytical lens for the documentary analysis and is revisited in the subsequent discussion of the findings.

B. Components of the Framework

Corporate identity. Corporate identity represents the meanings, values and characteristics that an organisation seeks to communicate to its stakeholders. These can be translated into emotional promises, such as care, celebration and connection, and functional promises concerning products, convenience, delivery and support.

Digital IMC. The brand promise is communicated across a digital ecosystem comprising organisation-controlled messages and consumer-generated communication. Integration is considered not only in terms of message consistency but also in terms of how different touchpoints contribute to a coherent customer journey.

Encounter. Consumers encounter communication through discovery, evaluation, purchase, delivery, receipt and post-purchase interaction. Because the present study does not collect direct consumer data, psychological responses such as perceived value, perceived risk and trust remain conceptual components of the framework rather than directly measured variables.

Proof. Fulfilment evidence can be drawn from two broad categories of sources. Organisational evidence includes product information, product representation, delivery information and service communication. Consumer-generated evidence includes reviews, UGC and eWOM. Such evidence may reinforce, qualify or challenge expectations.

Promise–proof gap. The central analytical construct is the potential misalignment between expectations generated by brand communication and the visibility, accessibility and contextual integration of evidence supporting those expectations. The concept is not mathematical and is not treated as a calculated variable. A potential gap may therefore arise even when evidence is available, if that evidence is insufficiently visible, accessible or connected to the original communicated promise.

This focus differs from the services gap model, which addresses discrepancies between external communication and actual service delivery [4]. The present framework concerns the communicative relationship between promise and visible proof.

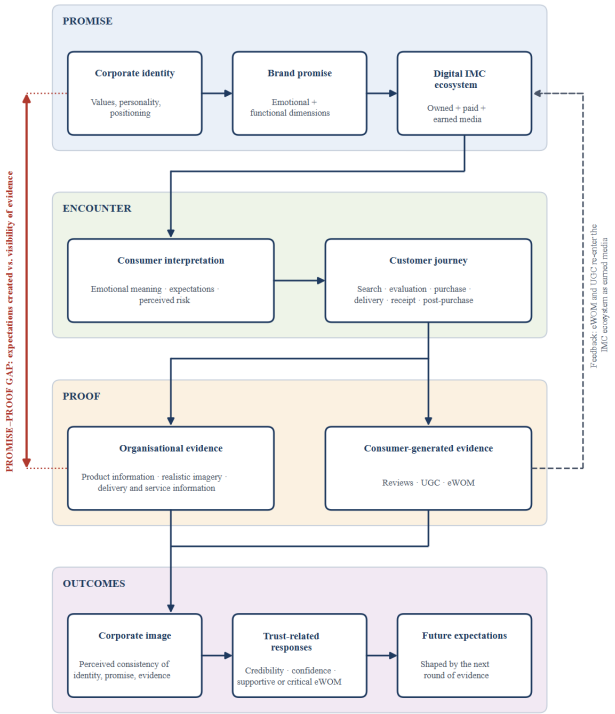


Figure 1: Promise–Proof IMC Framework

Note: the framework is conceptual. The relationships shown are not statistically established causal relationships, and direct consumer responses were not measured.

Outcomes and feedback. Evidence encountered through the customer journey may contribute to subsequent interpretations of corporate image, while supportive or critical experiences may generate further consumer communication. Trust-related responses and subsequent behavioural outcomes are treated as possible downstream consequences, rather than as outcomes measured or established by the present study.

The framework can therefore be summarised as:

Corporate identity → brand promise → digital IMC → customer journey → fulfilment evidence → corporate image → potential downstream responses

Consumer-generated communication, in turn, feeds back into the wider digital evidence environment.

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C. Analytical Propositions

The framework generates four exploratory propositions that may be examined in future empirical research. These propositions are derived conceptually from the framework and were not tested in the present qualitative case study.

P1: The greater the relevance and visibility of functional fulfilment evidence to a brand promise, the stronger its potential contribution to the perceived credibility of that promise.

P2: Organisational and consumer-generated evidence may play complementary roles in supporting a brand promise, with consumer-generated evidence potentially becoming more salient where organisational evidence is less visible.

P3: A potential promise–proof gap may arise when expectations generated by a brand promise are more prominent than the fulfilment evidence integrated into relevant touchpoints.

P4: Greater transparency in fulfilment communication may reduce the potential promise–proof gap without diminishing the emotional distinctiveness of the brand.

IV. Methodology

A. Research Design and Case Selection

This study adopts an exploratory, interpretive single-case design based on qualitative documentary analysis [28], [29]. A case approach is appropriate because the research questions concern how identity, promises and fulfilment evidence interact within a specific communication environment that cannot readily be separated from context [28]. The aim is to support analytical rather than statistical generalisation [30].

BloomThis MY was selected as an instrumental case [31] because it is a Malaysian digital-first florist and gifting SME that operates in an experience-based product category where emotional communication is prominent and consumer-generated content is publicly visible. The selected case is therefore suitable for examining how organisational communication, fulfilment evidence and customer-generated accounts interact within the same digital commercial environment.

B. Data Sources and Collection

Data were collected from publicly available online materials between May and August 2026. This specified period defines the temporal boundary of the documentary study. Because digital content can be modified, updated or removed over time, the findings describe the communication environment observed during the specified collection period rather than permanent or unchanging organisational practices.

Two principal types of empirical material were used: website content and customer reviews. Academic and secondary literature supported the interpretation of these materials but was not treated as empirical case evidence. Table 3 summarises the selected source types, their analytical roles and the materials examined.

The two review platforms differ in provenance and collection environment. Google Reviews are customer-generated reviews published on an external platform. Google applies policies and moderation processes to user-generated content on Maps and may remove or restrict content that violates its policies [32]. Stamped.io is a review-management platform that provides functionality for collecting customer reviews through mechanisms such as automated review-request emails and for displaying reviews through website widgets [33], [34]. The availability of these platform capabilities does not establish how BloomThis configured its own review-collection or review-display practices. Stamped.io reviews were therefore treated as customer-authored content within an organisation-integrated environment rather than as organisation-authored communication.

Table 3: Data Sources

Data source	Type	Role in analysis	Sample
BloomThis MY website	Organisation-controlled	Corporate identity, product and delivery communication	Corporate pages (Homepage, About Us, Why BloomThis?); Delivery Information, FAQ, Ordering Information and Contact Us; 5 product pages
Customer reviews (Google, n = 13; Stamped.io, n = 37)	Customer-generated; differing platform environments	Customer experience, eWOM and fulfilment evidence	50 reviews: 13 from Google Reviews and 37 from Stamped.io, selected using the most recent eligible reviews within the collection period

Materials were included when they were publicly accessible during the collection period, directly concerned BloomThis MY, and contained substantive information relevant to one or more of the research questions. Duplicate materials, purely transactional content and items unrelated to identity, communication, customer experience or fulfilment evidence were excluded from the analysis.

Corporate and delivery-related pages were reviewed during the collection period. Five product pages were selected, one from each principal product category presented on the BloomThis website: Flowers, Plants, Balloons, Gifts, and Food & Beverage. The selected pages were examined for product descriptions, visual representation, dimensions, composition or stem quantities, lifespan or freshness information, and information concerning substitution, availability or variation.

The five selected product pages were audited on the live website on 28 July 2026, a date within the defined May–August 2026 collection period. This five-page corpus supports qualitative comparisons across product categories but does not permit generalisation to all BloomThis MY product pages.

Google Reviews and Stamped.io reviews were selected according to a predefined criterion prioritising recency within the collection period. Eligible reviews were publicly accessible, fell within the collection period and contained substantive consumer-generated content relevant to the BloomThis customer experience. Duplicate or non-substantive entries were excluded.

The number of reviews initially screened was not recorded during the collection process and therefore cannot be reported reliably or reconstructed retrospectively.

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The most recent eligible reviews were selected sequentially from each platform, irrespective of rating or expressed sentiment, until a total of 50 reviews had been collected. All eligible Google Reviews within the collection window were included (n = 13), followed by the most recent eligible Stamped.io reviews, ordered by posting date, until the corpus reached 50 (n = 37).

The resulting 50 reviews constitute a purposively selected, criterion-based qualitative corpus rather than a probability sample. The purpose was to establish a bounded corpus of recent consumer-generated communication for thematic analysis, rather than to estimate the prevalence of particular customer experiences within the wider population of BloomThis customers.

C. Analytical Procedure

The collected materials were examined through thematic analysis [35], using a hybrid deductive–inductive approach [36]. A deductive codebook was developed from the relevant literature and research questions, while review sub-codes were developed inductively as recurring themes concerning fulfilment emerged in the reviews.

Table 4: Coding Framework

Code	Focus	Linked RQ
Emotional appeal	Love, happiness, celebration, care	RQ1, RQ2
Aesthetic appeal	Visual presentation and premium appearance	RQ2
Functional information	Product, price, delivery and practical information	RQ2, RQ4
Credibility cues	Reviews, evidence and reassurance	RQ2, RQ4
Social proof	User-generated content, reviews and consumer communication	RQ3
Transparency	Expectations, variation and limitations	RQ4, RQ5
IMC integration	Relationship between channels and touchpoints	RQ2
Customer experience	Journey from search to fulfilment	RQ4
Service recovery	Complaint and problem resolution	RQ4
Ethical communication	Disclosure, privacy and responsible communication	RQ5
Sustainability	Environmental claims and practices	RQ1, RQ5
Technology	Personalisation, tracking and AI	RQ5
Review sub-codes (inductive)		
Delivery timing and reliability	Punctuality, delays, delivery location and instructions	RQ3, RQ4
Product appearance	Aesthetic quality and presentation of the item received	RQ3
Freshness and condition	Freshness, wilting and product damage	RQ3, RQ4
Service response	Responsiveness, communication, complaint handling	RQ3, RQ4
Product–image correspondence	Correspondence between the received item and its website representation	RQ3, RQ4

The analysis followed six broad stages: familiarisation with the materials; systematic coding; development of candidate themes; review of those themes against the coded materials; definition and naming of themes; and synthesis of the findings in relation to the Promise–Proof IMC Framework. The deductive codes and inductively developed review sub-codes, together with their links to the research questions, are presented in Table 4.

Within the Functional Information and Transparency coding categories, each of the five selected product pages was examined for four fulfilment-related features: physical dimensions; composition or stem quantities; lifespan or freshness information; and substitution, availability or product variation. The analysis recorded whether the evidence was available directly on the product page, located on a separate page, or not observed. Where additional navigation was necessary, the number of required clicks was recorded for the selected page. Information prominence was assessed qualitatively with reference to the location of the material and its accessibility from the selected product page. Table 5 presents the resulting audit.

Table 5: Product-Page Fulfilment Evidence Audit

Product category	Selected product page	Dimensions	Composition / stem quantities	Lifespan / freshness	Substitution / variation
Flowers	Ashley Red Rose Bouquet	—	Product page; 0 clicks — Small: 8–10 red roses; Medium: 15–20; Large: 35–40, plus eucalyptus leaves	Product page; 0 clicks — 1–3 days	Product page; 0 clicks for size variation — Small/Medium/Large available. Substitution policy: separate page; 1 click
Plants	White Phalaenopsis Orchid (1 Stalk)	Product page; 0 clicks — 35 cm (W) × 60 cm (H)	Product page; 0 clicks — 1 Phalaenopsis orchid stalk	Product page; 0 clicks — 1–3 months	Product page; 0 clicks for product variation — seasonal pot design may change. Substitution policy: separate page; 1 click
Balloons	Baby Blue Helium Party Balloons	Product page; 0 clicks — Bobo: approx. 47 cm (D) × 182 cm (H); standard balloons: approx. 29 cm (D) × 187 cm (H)	Product page; 0 clicks — Double: 1 Bobo + 10 standard balloons; Single: 1 Bobo + 5 standard balloons	Product page; 0 clicks — Bobo: approx. 1–2 days; standard balloons: approx. 8–10 hours	Product page; 0 clicks — Single/Double variants. Substitution policy: separate page; 1 click
Gifts	Husband Gift Set	Product page; 0 clicks — flower-box dimensions and cake size specified	Product page; 0 clicks — floral composition and stalk ranges specified for each flower-box option	Product page; 0 clicks — flowers: 1–3 days	Product page; 0 clicks for component/variant information. Substitution policy: separate page; 1 click
Food & Beverage	Inside Scoop Signature Ice Cream Cake	Product page; 0 clicks — 1.5 kg; 7 in diameter	Product page; 0 clicks — ingredients and allergens stated	Product page; 0 clicks — 1 month in freezer; 45 minutes in cooler bag outside freezer	Product page; 0 clicks for product specification. Substitution policy: separate page; 1 click

Note. "Product page" indicates that the information was visible directly on the selected product page, without further navigation. "Separate page" indicates that the information was located elsewhere on the BloomThis MY website; for substitution, this refers to the general substitution policy in the website's Terms and Conditions. "—" indicates that the feature was not observed or was not applicable to the selected product. Click counts indicate the navigation actions required from the selected product page, with 0 indicating information visible without further navigation. The audit was conducted on the live website on 28 July 2026, within the May–August 2026 collection period.

Each review could be assigned more than one sub-code; consequently, the reported thematic frequencies are not mutually exclusive. For each coded reference, valence was recorded as positive, negative or mixed. A coded reference was classified as mixed only when that same thematic reference contained both favourable and unfavourable evaluations of the same aspect. Separate positive and negative statements concerning different themes were coded under the relevant themes and were not classified as mixed. No coded thematic reference met the specified criterion for mixed valence.

Table 6 reports the thematic frequencies and the corresponding valence distribution. Across the five themes, the analysis produced 94 coded thematic references, of which 66

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(70.2%) were positive and 28 (29.8%) were negative. These figures refer to coded thematic references rather than unique individual reviews because one review could contribute coded references to more than one theme. Accordingly, the 70.2% positive figure should not be interpreted as the proportion of positive reviews.

Table 6: Review Themes, Frequencies and Valence (n = 50 Reviews)

Theme	Reviews (n)	% of 50	Positive	Negative	Mixed	Google (of 13)	Stamped.io (of 37)
Delivery timing and reliability	26	52%	19	7	0	5	21
Product appearance	24	48%	19	5	0	4	20
Service response	22	44%	15	7	0	2	20
Freshness and condition	15	30%	8	7	0	7	8
Product–image correspondence	7	14%	5	2	0	1	6

Note. A review could be coded under more than one theme, so rows do not sum to 50. Valence was recorded for each coded reference as positive, negative or mixed. A reference was classified as mixed only when the same thematic reference contained both favourable and unfavourable evaluations of the same aspect; no coded reference met this criterion. Across the five themes, 66 of 94 coded thematic references (70.2%) were positive and 28 (29.8%) were negative. Platform columns show the number of reviews under each theme originating from each platform. The 13 Google and 37 Stamped.io reviews reflect the study's predefined platform-by-platform selection procedure rather than the relative volume of reviews available on the two platforms. Frequencies describe the analysed corpus and are not prevalence estimates for BloomThis MY's customers.

The promise–proof gap was examined conceptually by comparing expectations generated through emotional and aesthetic communication with the visibility, location, accessibility and integration of fulfilment evidence across the relevant website touchpoints. Customer-generated reviews were treated as an additional layer of documentary evidence through which reported experiences could reinforce, qualify, or challenge expectations.

The promise–proof gap was not calculated numerically and was not treated as a measured variable.

The primary coding was undertaken by the researcher using the predefined deductive codebook and the inductively developed review sub-codes. An independent check of approximately 15–20 reviews and a re-audit of the five selected product pages were contemplated as procedures for strengthening dependability. However, the materials supplied for this revision do not document a completed second-coder exercise, the number of independently coded reviews, or the agreement statistics. Consequently, no intercoder reliability estimate is claimed. A completed review should assess agreement on thematic assignment and valence, while the product-page re-audit should compare feature classifications and recorded navigation requirements. Any disagreements should be resolved using the specified coding criteria, with the number of independently reviewed items and the resulting agreement measures reported transparently. Such results would establish agreement only within the reviewed subset, not the representativeness of the broader customer-review corpus.

D. Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was addressed through credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability [37], [38].

Credibility was supported by comparing organisation-controlled website communication with customer-generated reviews and by distinguishing Google Reviews from Stamped.io according to provenance and collection environment.

Dependability was supported by documenting the analytical procedure, specifying a predefined codebook, applying explicit inductive review coding, and retaining the audit date and the selected review corpus. The number of reviews screened was not recorded, and the product-page audit was not archived, limiting complete replication.

Confirmability was supported by distinguishing observable evidence from the researcher's interpretation and linking coding decisions to the research questions and conceptual framework. Because the available record does not document completed independent coding, the interpretation primarily reflects the researcher's analytical perspective.

Transferability was supported through detailed description of the case, data sources, collection period and analytical boundaries. The study is not designed to support statistical generalisation beyond the organisational case examined here.

E. Ethical Considerations

The study used publicly accessible organisational and consumer-generated materials and involved no recruitment, direct interaction or intervention. The public availability of these materials was not treated as unrestricted permission to reproduce information identifying individual consumers.

Google Reviews and Stamped.io represent different digital environments for consumer-generated content. Google applies content policies and moderation processes to Maps user-generated content, including reviews, and content may be removed where it violates applicable policies or other removal criteria [32]. Stamped.io provides functionality for collecting customer reviews, including automated review requests that can be scheduled after an order is fulfilled or placed, and for displaying collected reviews on websites through review widgets [33], [34]. These platform characteristics were considered as contextual features of the review environment rather than as evidence of how BloomThis configured its own systems.

Reviewer usernames, profile identifiers, contact details and other directly identifying information were not retained in the analytical dataset. Where examples were required, consumer comments were paraphrased rather than reproduced verbatim, and individual reviewers were not identified in the manuscript.

The study was also informed by Malaysia's Personal Data Protection Act 2010 (Act 709) [39] and Personal Data Protection (Amendment) Act 2024 (Act A1727) [40]. Personal information unnecessary for the research purpose was not collected or retained. Public accessibility was not treated as unrestricted permission to reproduce identifiable personal information.

The broader Malaysian consumer-protection context was also recognised. The Consumer Protection Act 1999 (Act 599) [41] and the Consumer Protection (Electronic Trade Transaction) Regulations 2024 [42] are relevant to electronic commercial communication. The study does not, however, assess BloomThis's legal compliance or interpret the observed communication as establishing compliance or non-compliance.

BloomThis MY is named because the study is an organisational case analysis of publicly observable communication. The organisation is treated as the identifiable case rather than as a proxy for Malaysian gifting SMEs generally. No private organisational information was used in the analysis, and the study makes no unsupported claims concerning the company's internal practices.

Ethical approval was not sought because the research involved no recruitment or interaction with human participants and relied on public materials. Nevertheless, reviewer privacy, data minimisation and responsible representation of consumer-generated content were maintained throughout the analysis.

V. Findings

This section reports findings from BloomThis MY website materials and 50 customer reviews collected between May and August 2026. The findings concern publicly visible organisational communication and the content of the selected customer reviews. They do not measure consumer trust, satisfaction or service performance.

A. Corporate Identity: Emotional, Lifestyle-Oriented and Value-Extended (RQ1)

BloomThis constructs its corporate identity around emotional gifting, aesthetic presentation, convenience and interpersonal connection. Flowers and gifts are presented not simply as commercial products but also as ways of expressing personal feelings and marking significant occasions. The brand frames its purpose around creating "moments of happiness" [13], reinforcing an experience-oriented rather than purely transactional positioning.

Corporate communication also combines emotional meaning with functional attributes. The homepage, "About Us" and "Why BloomThis?" materials connect occasion-oriented gifting with features such as personalised cards, photographs and same-day delivery. The resulting communication therefore addresses both what consumers are purchasing and what the gift symbolically represents within a relationship or significant occasion.

The identity also extends beyond product and emotion. BloomThis communicates values relating to inclusivity, diversity and innovation, alongside environmental practices such as recyclable flower boxes, green-waste repurposing and delivery optimisation [13]. The communicated proposition can therefore be understood across product, emotional, service, social and environmental dimensions. The present analysis concerns these publicly communicated commitments rather than practices that have been independently verified by the researcher.

Overall, the identity is coherent in its emphasis on beautiful and thoughtful gifting. This emotional and aesthetic emphasis becomes analytically important because it creates expectations that may subsequently be interpreted through fulfilment evidence.

B. Emotional, Visual and Functional Communication (RQ2)

Visual and emotional communication is particularly prominent throughout the website materials included in the analysis. Recurring themes include beauty, celebration, romance, happiness, thoughtfulness, premium presentation and lifestyle. The website also organises products around meaningful occasions such as Anniversary, Love and Proposal. The "Stunning Love Flowers" collection provides a clear example by placing floral products within a love-oriented purchasing context [43].

Emotional and functional forms of brand communication are not, however, mutually exclusive. The "Stunning Love Flowers" collection combines romance-oriented positioning with same-day delivery information, while product and delivery materials combine presentation with practical information. BloomThis therefore does not rely exclusively on emotional appeals; functional service information is incorporated into its digital presentation.

The location and prominence of different types of information vary across individual digital touchpoints. Collection and homepage materials connect emotional or occasion-based positioning with service convenience, while more detailed product information—including dimensions, composition or stem quantities and lifespan—is provided at product-page level. Different touchpoints therefore perform different communicative functions within the customer journey.

In online gifting, photographs, styling and descriptions provide representations before the physical product is encountered. Later evidence concerning appearance, scale, quality, condition and variation may therefore become relevant to how the promise is interpreted. The present study does not establish that consumers systematically compare digital representations with the physical products they ultimately receive. Rather, it identifies a communication mechanism through which visual and emotional representations may generate expectations that are later interpreted in relation to fulfilment evidence.

C. Operational Evidence: Present But Less Prominent and Dispersed (RQ2, RQ4)

The product-page audit identified relevant operational evidence within each of the five selected product categories. This finding therefore concerns the location and integration of specific fulfilment information rather than the absence of operational evidence.

As shown in Table 5, the selected product pages provided information concerning dimensions, composition or stem quantities, lifespan or freshness, and product-level variation or specification. The form and level of detail varied across

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product categories. The selected food and beverage product, for example, included category-specific information such as weight, diameter, ingredients and appropriate storage conditions. These details provide practical information about what consumers may receive and, where relevant, how products should be handled.

A consistent distinction emerged between product-level variation and general substitution conditions. Product-level variation or specification information was available directly on each of the five selected product pages, including size options, single and double balloon variants, component or floral options, and information indicating that the pot design may change. The general substitution policy, however, was located in the website's Terms and Conditions and required one additional click from each selected product page. The observed dispersion of information therefore concerns the location of the general substitution policy, rather than any general absence of product-level variation information. The study did not examine whether this additional navigation requirement has any measurable effect on consumer behaviour or purchasing decisions.

The findings therefore point to a difference in where specific types of fulfilment evidence are communicated. Product-level information concerning dimensions, composition, lifespan and variation was generally visible directly on the selected pages, whereas the general substitution policy was located elsewhere on the website. The issue is consequently not simply whether supporting evidence exists, but whether that evidence is directly connected to the product-evaluation context in which consumer expectations are initially formed.

This distinction illustrates the complementary roles of symbolic and functional forms of communication within the digital customer journey. Emotional communication establishes why the product matters, while fulfilment evidence provides information about what may be received, its characteristics and possible variation. Where an emotionally prominent presentation is accompanied by supporting information that is located elsewhere, such as the general substitution policy, a potential promise–proof gap may arise. This interpretation does not imply that emotional communication should be reduced; rather, relevant fulfilment evidence may be integrated more directly and effectively with the expectations established by emotional brand communication.

The principal case observations and their corresponding documentary sources are organised by research question in Table 7. This overview distinguishes the website and review evidence underpinning each finding without treating the summary as a separate measurement of customer attitudes.

Taken together, the findings indicate that the relevant issue is not simply whether supporting evidence exists, but how visibly and contextually that evidence is integrated with the promises communicated to consumers.

Table 7: Overview of Case Evidence by Research Question

RQ	Key finding	Principal evidence
RQ1	BloomThis constructs an emotional, aesthetic and lifestyle-oriented identity extending to social and environmental values.	Homepage, About Us and Why BloomThis?
RQ2	Emotional and visual communication is prominent, while operational evidence is present directly on the selected product pages; the general substitution policy is located separately.	Website materials; Table 5
RQ3	Consumer-generated content provides an additional evidence layer containing both reinforcing and challenging accounts of fulfilment.	50 customer reviews; Table 6
RQ4	A potential promise–proof gap may arise where expectations are more prominent than supporting evidence that is directly integrated into the relevant product-evaluation context.	Comparison of communication and fulfilment evidence; Table 5
RQ5	The findings imply a need for transparent, evidence-led and ethically responsible digital communication, including responsible technology use.	Discussion in Section VI

D. Consumer-Generated Communication as a Second Layer of Evidence (RQ3)

Consumer-generated communication forms a second layer of evidence around BloomThis's corporate communication. Corporate communication is authored by the organisation, whereas reviews are authored by customers and may extend beyond the intended brand narrative. At the same time, customer authorship does not mean that review visibility and review collection are entirely independent of platform characteristics and organisational context. In this corpus, 37 of the 50 reviews came from Stamped.io, an organisation-integrated review system capable of review solicitation, whereas 13 were externally published Google Reviews.

The reviews addressed both the symbolic and the functional dimensions of product and service fulfilment. Positive accounts described products as beautiful, attractive, fresh or well presented, while critical accounts raised concerns involving wilting, damage, delivery delays, communication problems and differences between received products and online representations.

Delivery timing and reliability constituted the most frequently observed theme in the analysed review corpus. Positive accounts described prompt and efficient delivery, while critical accounts included delays, incorrect delivery, instructions not being followed and products being left at a guardhouse without adequate communication. Delivery-related reviews therefore provide consumer-generated evidence through which the service-related dimensions of the brand proposition may be reinforced, qualified or challenged.

Product appearance was also a prominent theme within the selected customer reviews. Some reviews described flowers

and arrangements as beautiful, attractive, impressive, or well presented, whereas other references raised concerns about presentation, damage, or perceived quality. These accounts provide post-purchase evidence that is relevant to the visual expectations established by the brand before a purchase takes place.

Service response included positive references to professional, friendly, responsive and helpful service, alongside critical accounts concerning communication breakdowns, difficulties obtaining responses and dissatisfaction with complaint handling. These findings describe the content of the selected reviews and do not establish an overall or independently verified level of service performance.

Freshness and product condition provided another distinguishable form of evidence concerning fulfilment. Positive references described freshness and good condition, while critical references included wilting, browning and damage. Because freshness cannot be fully evaluated through digital representation alone, consumer-generated accounts provide subsequent consumers with additional information about an experience-based attribute.

Product–image correspondence, although coded less frequently, directly connects corporate product representations with evidence concerning products actually received by consumers. Seven of the 50 reviews (14%) contained references coded under this theme. Some indicated close correspondence or that the product was as advertised, while others described differences between expectations and the received item. This theme therefore provides a particularly clear illustration of the relationship between communicated product promises and subsequent evidence of fulfilment.

The two review environments were retained as distinct sources in the analysis because they differ in provenance, collection mechanisms and presentation context. Google Reviews are externally published customer-generated content, while Stamped.io reviews are customer-generated content collected and displayed through an organisation-integrated review system. The distinction does not imply that Stamped.io reviews are organisation-authored. The 13/37 platform split reflects the stated selection rule—all eligible Google Reviews were included first, followed by the most recent eligible Stamped.io reviews until the total reached 50—and should therefore not be interpreted as evidence that one platform generated more reviews than the other.

The 50 selected reviews should not be regarded as representative of all customer experiences or as entirely independent of contextual influences. The corpus was criterion-selected according to recency rather than probability sampling. Individual reviews describe particular transactions, and review visibility may be influenced by platform moderation, presentation and collection practices. The frequencies reported in Table 6 therefore describe patterns within the analysed corpus rather than customer satisfaction rates or population-level measures of consumer attitudes.

This finding extends the conventional view of IMC beyond the messages directly controlled and disseminated by the organisation. eWOM and UGC form part of the broader information environment in which promises are encountered and interpreted. Organisation-controlled communication helps establish expectations, while customer accounts provide an additional layer of post-purchase evidence that may reinforce, qualify or challenge those expectations.

E. The Promise–Proof Gap and Identity–Image Tension (RQ4)

The analysis indicates a relatively coherent intended corporate identity centred on beauty, emotional connection, convenience, premium gifting and happiness. Yet when consumers move from encountering the promise to evaluating fulfilment, practical considerations become salient, including delivery reliability, product condition, correspondence between representation and receipt, service response and customer-generated accounts.

The findings suggest conditions under which a potential promise–proof gap may arise: the prominence of emotional and visual communication may exceed the visibility and integration of supporting fulfilment evidence at particular touchpoints. The study does not establish the magnitude of any gap, service failure or consumer response.

The issue may extend beyond product and service communication. BloomThis also communicates social and environmental commitments. Each additional area of communication creates another context in which supporting evidence may become relevant. A broader set of corporate promises may therefore become more difficult to sustain through communication when supporting evidence is not equally visible, accessible or integrated across the relevant touchpoints. This is a conceptual observation, not a conclusion that broader promises necessarily create a gap.

The promise–proof perspective consequently extends the identity–image relationship by directing attention to the evidence encountered between intended representation and stakeholder interpretation. It identifies an intermediate communication condition: the visibility and integration of fulfilment evidence through which consumers may interpret whether an identity-based promise appears credible.

F. Summary of Findings

The documentary analysis identifies the potential promise–proof gap as the study's central analytical insight: a communication-level pattern involving the prominence and contextual integration of fulfilment evidence. Table 8 consolidates these findings by research question and identifies the main sources of supporting evidence.

Taken together, these findings show that the central issue is not simply whether evidence exists, but how visibly and contextually that evidence is integrated with the promises communicated to consumers.

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Table 8: Consolidated Findings by Research Question

RQ	Key finding	Principal evidence
RQ1	BloomThis constructs an emotional, aesthetic and lifestyle-oriented identity extending to social and environmental values.	Homepage, About Us and Why BloomThis?
RQ2	Emotional and visual communication is prominent, while operational evidence is present but less prominent and dispersed across touchpoints.	Campaign and delivery materials; Table 5
RQ3	Consumer-generated content provides an additional evidence layer. In the corpus, most coded references were positive, while negative references were observed across delivery timing and reliability, product appearance, service response, freshness and condition, and product–image correspondence (Table 6).	Consumer reviews and related content
RQ4	A potential promise–proof gap may arise where expectations are more prominent than the supporting evidence integrated into relevant touchpoints.	Comparison of promise and evidence; Table 5; Section V-E
RQ5	Greater transparency, clearer fulfilment evidence and ethically responsible technology may strengthen digital IMC.	Discussion in Section VI

VI. Discussion

A. From Message Consistency to Promise–Proof Integration

The findings contribute to IMC scholarship by suggesting that integration involves more than consistency across channels. BloomThis communicates a recognisable emotional brand proposition, yet some forms of supporting fulfilment evidence are less prominent or located in separate website sections. Consistency across communication channels helps establish corporate identity, but credibility may also depend on whether consumers can access evidence concerning what they may reasonably expect from the subsequent fulfilment experience.

The study therefore proposes a complementary form of IMC integration: messages, evidence and experience. Product information, delivery communication, service interactions and consumer-generated content become part of the communication environment through which a promise is interpreted. This extends the channel-centred emphasis of conventional IMC towards a more promise-centred perspective in which operational touchpoints can function as meaningful components of brand communication.

B. The Promise–Proof Gap as a Conceptual Extension

The promise–proof gap is the central conceptual contribution of this study. It draws attention to the relationship between communicative promises and the visibility, accessibility and contextual integration of evidence supporting those promises across the customer journey.

This perspective extends, rather than replaces, established theories. Services gap literature addresses discrepancies between external communication and service delivery; promise-based perspectives address making, enabling and keeping promises; signalling and authenticity perspectives emphasise observable cues and consistency between representations and practice. The present concept introduces a further question situated between promise and performance: how visible, accessible and contextually relevant is the evidence through which consumers can evaluate the credibility of a particular promise?

The concept also develops the identity–image relationship in digital experience-based commerce. Corporate identity concerns intended organisational representation, while corporate image concerns stakeholder interpretation [14], [15]. Fulfilment evidence provides a potentially important intermediate layer through which stakeholder interpretations of the intended corporate identity may be formed. Product information, delivery communication, service responses and consumer-generated accounts do not replace identity or image; they connect them.

The construct remains analytical rather than validated. It does not measure the magnitude of a gap or establish effects on trust, behaviour or performance. Its principal value therefore lies in providing a conceptual lens for studying these relationships and a basis for their future empirical operationalisation.

C. Operational Communication and eWOM as Brand Evidence

The findings suggest that operational information should be recognised as part of brand communication. Delivery information may provide evidence relevant to reliability; product dimensions may support transparency; variation information may reduce uncertainty; and service responses may communicate care and responsiveness. In digital commerce, the boundary between marketing communication and operations is therefore increasingly porous.

This has particular relevance for SMEs because the communication value of operational touchpoints does not necessarily require a large increase in promotional activity. Existing customer-facing processes can provide evidence for brand promises when they are communicated clearly and consistently.

The findings also support treating eWOM as a component of the broader IMC environment, rather than viewing it solely as an outcome of marketing activity. Reviews and other consumer-generated content may reinforce organisational claims, add evidence absent from official communication, or reveal discrepancies between expectation and experience [3], [19]. Because such content cannot be fully controlled, reputation depends less on managing every message than on maintaining alignment between promise, experience and publicly visible evidence.

D. Emotional Branding, Transparency and Ethical Technology

The findings also reveal an important tension within the practice of emotional branding. Emotional communication gives products symbolic significance [17], [18], but the more a

product is positioned as an expression of care or celebration, the more relevant fulfilment may become to the meaning of the experience. Delivery timing, product appearance, freshness, personalisation and service response can therefore acquire symbolic importance alongside their functional roles.

This does not imply that emotional branding should be reduced. Instead, emotional communication may be strengthened when practical evidence is integrated with it. A promise of meaningful gifting can be complemented by clear information about what the recipient will receive and how delivery conditions operate.

RQ5 also points towards responsible use of digital technologies. Digital technology can help reduce uncertainty through product guidance, delivery visibility and customer support, but it can also create additional risks when automated systems are opaque, misleading or overly confident in their responses. Responsible digital IMC should therefore emphasise transparency, accuracy, appropriate human escalation, data minimisation and clear distinctions between organisation-controlled and consumer-generated information.

The provenance and presentation context of customer-generated evidence are particularly relevant to this discussion. Organisations should distinguish externally posted reviews from reviews collected through their own systems rather than presenting organisation-mediated review environments as though they were wholly independent. Broader guidance on review integrity and digital transparency provides a useful benchmark for this principle [44].

VII. Managerial Implications

The following managerial implications are conceptual applications derived from the proposed framework and the findings of the documentary analysis. They do not describe current BloomThis practices or claim that the proposed actions have been empirically validated. For experience-based SMEs, the central implication is not necessarily to increase the volume of promotional communication, but to strengthen the connection among brand promises, supporting evidence and delivered customer experiences.

A. Evidence-Led Product and Delivery Communication

Product pages provide a primary opportunity to connect emotional positioning with practical evidence. Experience-based SMEs can consider realistic product representation, scale and dimension cues, information on natural variation, freshness or care, clear substitution conditions, and visible delivery requirements. The objective is not to replace aesthetic and emotional communication, but to ensure that important expectations created by such communication are accompanied by relevant functional evidence.

The key distinction is that information being available does not necessarily mean that it is sufficiently prominent or integrated with the expectation it supports. Relevant evidence may exist elsewhere on a website yet remain less immediately connected to the specific product or brand promise being evaluated by consumers. SMEs can therefore prioritise low-cost improvements such as clearer dimensions, variation information, substitution wording and delivery cut-off information before introducing more resource-intensive technologies.

Operational touchpoints can also function as brand evidence. Delivery communication can demonstrate transparency about timing and conditions, while customer-service responses can communicate responsiveness and care. Recurring customer questions and complaints can further identify where product pages, FAQs or delivery information require clarification. In this sense, customer-service activity can contribute to organisational communication intelligence rather than serving exclusively as a function for resolving individual problems.

B. Journey-Oriented Integration of Promise, Evidence and Experience

Digital IMC can be organised around the complete customer journey rather than being managed solely through individual communication channels. Awareness-oriented communication may establish emotional meaning, product pages can provide functional evidence, reviews can provide consumer-generated perspectives, delivery communication can provide fulfilment visibility, and customer service can support clarification and recovery. Different touchpoints therefore perform different roles while contributing to the same underlying promise.

This approach moves IMC beyond the repeated delivery of a common message towards the deliberate coordination of brand promises, supporting evidence and customer experience. The illustrative architecture in Table 9 shows how emotional positioning can be complemented by product proof, delivery proof and transparency without requiring every touchpoint to communicate every dimension.

Table 9: Illustrative Promise–Proof Communication Architecture

Dimension	Role	Illustrative message
Emotional promise	Establishes why the product matters	"Make every relationship count."
Product proof	Shows what the consumer can reasonably expect to receive	"See what you are sending."
Delivery proof	Provides fulfilment visibility where delivery tracking or related information is available	"Know where your gift is."
Transparency	Sets expectations, including variation and limitations	"Know what to expect."

Note: The proposed communication architecture is illustrative and is not derived from BloomThis's current communication system.

The specific balance among these dimensions should depend on the product, customer journey, available evidence and operational context. The same principle can guide influencer and creator communication: demonstrations and claims should remain consistent with the experiences that an organisation can credibly support, while relevant commercial relationships should be clearly disclosed to audiences. Sustainability and other corporate-value claims should likewise be connected to identifiable practices or evidence rather than broad assertions.

A journey-oriented approach also broadens responsibility beyond marketing. Product substitutions, delivery problems and service-recovery issues involve operational staff, suppliers, delivery partners and customer-service personnel as well as consumers. Promise–proof alignment is therefore a cross-functional communication issue rather than a responsibility that can be assigned exclusively to marketing personnel.

C. Responsible Digital and AI Communication (RQ5)

Digital technologies can strengthen promise–proof alignment when they reduce uncertainty and help consumers understand products, delivery expectations and service processes. Potential applications include gifting recommendations, product guidance, delivery information, automated responses to routine questions and identification of complex or potentially dissatisfied interactions for escalation to human staff. These possibilities are proposed applications for consideration, rather than descriptions of technology systems currently implemented by BloomThis.

Responsible implementation should follow several principles. First, the use of AI should be disclosed when consumers interact directly with AI-mediated communication systems. Second, systems should avoid false guarantees concerning delivery, availability, product suitability or other outcomes and should communicate known limitations accurately. Third, human escalation should remain available for complex, sensitive or unresolved cases. Fourth, personal-data collection should be minimised and appropriate privacy and data-governance safeguards applied. Automated recommendations or classifications should also be monitored for potentially inappropriate or biased outputs, with clear mechanisms for correction available where necessary [45]–[47].

Responsible technology should extend beyond AI to review-management systems, personalisation and automated customer communication. Organisations should distinguish between externally posted consumer reviews and reviews collected through their own systems rather than presenting organisation-mediated customer feedback as though it were wholly independent. More broadly, digital technologies can contribute to the credibility of brand communication only when the information they provide is accurate, transparent and useful to consumers.

The same principle applies to consumer feedback. Reviews, complaints and recurring service questions can inform improvements to product information, delivery communication and service-recovery processes. Where such information is used for personalisation or AI-assisted analysis, organisations should apply appropriate privacy and data-governance safeguards, including data minimisation, secure handling and use for legitimate purposes relevant to the communication activity, consistent with the Personal Data Protection Act 2010 (Act 709) [39], as amended by the Personal Data Protection (Amendment) Act 2024 (Act A1727) [40].

Overall, experience-based digital SMEs can strengthen the credibility of their brands not simply by making additional claims, but by ensuring that important claims are accompanied by relevant evidence and supported by experiences delivered consistently across the customer journey.

VIII. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study has several limitations, each of which also identifies an appropriate direction for future research, as summarised in Table 10.

Table 10: Limitations and Corresponding Research Directions

Limitation	Implication	Future research direction
Single case of a Malaysian digital gifting SME	Findings are context-specific and offer analytical, not statistical, generalisation	Comparative multi-case studies across markets and sectors, such as hospitality, food delivery, beauty and healthcare services, tourism, online retail and events
Small, selected corpus: five product pages (one per category) and 50 reviews; social media not analysed	Observations about the visibility and dispersion of evidence are indicative, not representative of all BloomThis MY product pages; the findings do not cover BloomThis's social media communication	Audit of a larger, systematically sampled set of product pages using the same feature framework, and systematic analysis of social media content
Number of reviews screened was not recorded	The selection process cannot be fully audited or replicated, and the proportion of eligible reviews is unknown	Record a screening log (reviews screened, included, excluded and reasons) and report the sampling frame and platform
Selection and curation of consumer-generated content	Reviews from Google and Stamped.io may be affected by platform moderation, review solicitation and visibility, were not independently verified, and may not represent all customer experiences	Cross-platform analysis, including customer-generated evidence, and comparison of brand-displayed and externally posted reviews
Public online materials only; no consumer data	Consumer perceptions, credibility, satisfaction and intentions were not measured; internal processes were not observed	Surveys, experiments and interviews with consumers, and interviews with managers and staff
Dynamic digital environment	Findings reflect the communication environment observed between May–August 2026	Longitudinal capture across promotional cycles and periods of organisational change
No documented intercoder assessment	Interpretation reflects the primary researcher's analytical perspective, and independently replicated coding is not established	Multiple coders, intercoder agreement procedures and systematic coding protocols
Promise–proof gap as a conceptual construct	Not a validated measure; its explanatory and predictive validity is untested	Operationalisation and testing, including a Promise–Proof Alignment Scale
Product-page audit not archived	The audit cannot be independently verified against saved copies	Archive dated captures of audited pages during collection

Because the review sample was assembled from two platforms using a sequential selection rule, differences in the thematic counts between Google Reviews and Stamped.io should not be interpreted as comparative measures of customer satisfaction or platform-level sentiment. Future replication should document retrieval dates, eligibility decisions, coding revisions, and platform-specific source records so that changes in review visibility can be distinguished from changes in the underlying customer experience.

Future research should translate the promise–proof perspective into testable propositions that examine whether the visibility, accessibility and contextual integration of fulfilment

evidence are associated with consumers' responses to brand communication. Testing these propositions across larger samples, additional sectors and diverse digital contexts, alongside the development and validation of suitable measures, would help establish the explanatory and predictive value of the proposed construct.

IX. Conclusion

This study proposes a promise–proof perspective for examining digital IMC in experience-based SMEs. The BloomThis case illustrates how emotional and aesthetic communication may generate expectations, while product information, delivery communication and consumer-generated content provide supporting evidence through which consumers may interpret those expectations. In the five selected product pages, operational evidence concerning dimensions, composition, lifespan and product variation was generally available directly, while the general substitution policy was located in a separate section of the website. Customer reviews provided a further layer of evidence, containing accounts of fulfilment that both reinforced and challenged aspects of the communicated brand promise.

The central contribution of this study is to extend the discussion of IMC beyond message consistency towards the more comprehensive alignment of messages, supporting evidence and customer experience. The promise–proof gap provides a conceptual lens for identifying potential misalignment between expectations generated by brand communication and the visibility, accessibility and contextual integration of supporting fulfilment evidence. It is not a measure of service failure, trust or consumer response.

For experience-based SMEs, the practical implication is not to replace emotional branding with purely functional communication, but to connect emotionally meaningful promises with accessible and contextually relevant evidence throughout the customer journey. Future research can test whether stronger promise–proof alignment is associated with perceived credibility, trust, customer experience and behavioural outcomes. The study's limitations and corresponding directions for future research, including the proposed testing and operationalisation of the promise–proof perspective, are discussed in Section VIII.

Author Contributions

All authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study, data collection and analysis, and the drafting and critical revision of the manuscript. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding this manuscript.

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Data Availability

The study analyzed publicly accessible BloomThis MY website content, five selected product pages, and 50 publicly posted customer reviews collected between May and August 2026. The aggregate thematic counts and product-page observations supporting the reported analysis are presented in the manuscript. The aggregate observations supporting the findings are reported in the tables. Dated webpage captures and review-level coding records are not included with the manuscript. The availability of additional supporting materials for confidential scholarly verification should be confirmed with the authors and remains subject to reviewer privacy protections, relevant platform terms, and applicable data-protection requirements.

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