

Yekateryna Kuznetsova

*Kyiv National University of Technologies and Design
(Kyiv, Ukraine)*

Nataliia Liubymova

*Kyiv National University of Technologies and Design
(Kyiv, Ukraine)*

EATING WITH THE EYES: THE IMPORTANCE OF VISUAL IDENTITY IN HOSPITALITY BRANDING

In the contemporary hospitality industry, the concept of “eating with the eyes” extends far beyond the visual appeal of food itself. It reflects a broader phenomenon in which the entire visual environment of a restaurant, café, or bar influences perception, expectations, and customer behavior. Visual identity has become a central element of branding, shaping not only how a space looks but how it is experienced.

Historically, visual communication in food establishments was limited to simple signs and symbols that served practical purposes of identification. Over time, however, these elements evolved into more complex systems of differentiation. With the growth of competition and consumer culture, visual design began to function as a strategic tool rather than merely a decorative or informational component.

Today, visual identity is understood as a coherent system that integrates multiple elements, including color, typography, composition, and spatial design. It represents the visual language through which a brand communicates its values and positioning (Alona, 2025). In hospitality, where the product is inseparable from the environment, this system becomes especially important, as it shapes the first impression even before direct interaction with the service.

Color plays a key role in this process. It functions as a psychological trigger that influences perception at a subconscious level. Research shows that colors evoke specific associations and emotional responses, directly affecting appetite, mood, and expectations (Korotenko, 2021). For instance, warm colors are often associated with energy and stimulation, while darker tones may communicate exclusivity or

sophistication. Thus, color becomes an essential instrument in constructing the emotional narrative of a brand.

At the same time, effective visual identity relies on fundamental design principles. Balance, hierarchy, contrast, and consistency ensure clarity and recognizability, allowing users to process visual information quickly and intuitively (Torre, 2017). In hospitality branding, where multiple touchpoints coexist, consistency is particularly crucial, as it reinforces brand recognition and builds trust.

A central element of any visual identity system is the logo. The logo serves as the primary visual marker of a brand and often becomes the first point of contact between the business and the consumer. It is defined as a graphic symbol or sign used to identify and represent a company or product (Promodex, 2024). Within the structure of brand identity, the logo occupies a dominant position, acting as a condensed representation of the brand's meaning and values.

The effectiveness of a logo lies in its ability to communicate quickly and memorably. A well-designed logo distinguishes a brand from competitors, reinforces its positioning, and contributes to its recognition in the market. It often combines typographic and graphic elements into a unified composition, ensuring adaptability across different media formats. Moreover, the logo performs multiple functions simultaneously, including identification, emotional expression, and communication of brand characteristics. This multifunctionality makes it one of the most powerful tools in visual branding.

In the hospitality sector, the logo also plays a crucial role in shaping expectations. Before entering a space, customers often encounter the logo on signage, menus, or digital platforms. This initial visual interaction forms a preliminary impression of the brand, influencing perceptions of quality, atmosphere, and positioning. Therefore, the logo must align with the overall identity system to ensure coherence and authenticity.

The impact of visual identity on consumer behavior is well documented. Studies show that visual elements significantly influence attitudes, trust, and purchase decisions (Yu, 2024). In the context of hospitality, where choices are often made quickly and emotionally, this influence becomes particularly strong. Customers are drawn to environments that visually resonate with their preferences and expectations.

In addition, modern hospitality branding has shifted toward experience-oriented models. Consumers no longer seek only products but complete experiences that combine design, atmosphere, and storytelling. Visual identity functions as a framework that organizes these elements into a coherent narrative. As emphasized in design research, the creation of a firm style is not limited to aesthetics but involves strategic decisions that connect design with brand positioning (Shapoval, Maznichenko, Osadcha, 2023, p. 45).

Digital culture further amplifies the importance of visual identity. Social media platforms transform hospitality spaces into visual content, where design directly influences visibility and popularity. Interiors, packaging, and presentation are increasingly designed to be visually engaging and shareable, extending the brand's identity into digital environments.

At the same time, the growing importance of visual identity introduces new challenges. The widespread use of trends and standardized solutions can lead to visual homogenization, making it more difficult for brands to stand out. In such conditions, originality and conceptual clarity become essential. A strong visual identity must not only attract attention but also convey meaning and authenticity.

Visual identity also operates at a deeper psychological level. It shapes expectations before the actual experience occurs, influencing how customers interpret what they see and feel. As a result, perception of quality is often formed through visual cues rather than objective characteristics (Redaktsiia OFFZMI, 2025). This demonstrates that design is not merely a surface layer but a powerful tool of communication and influence.

In conclusion, visual identity has become a fundamental component of hospitality branding, transforming the way consumers perceive and experience food spaces. Its evolution from simple markers to complex systems reflects broader changes in design and consumer culture. Elements such as color, composition, and especially the logo work together to create a coherent and memorable brand image. In a highly competitive and visually driven environment, the ability to design a strong visual identity is essential for achieving recognition, emotional connection, and long-term success.

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