

Study on Visual Identity Elements Used in the Coffee Market in the Digital Age

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Abstract

Historical visual identity features have been used primarily in the physical environment. Its application in the virtual world has become essential due to digitalization and digital marketing development. The Romanian coffee market is characterized by several elements, such as preferences for specific varieties of coffee, consumption patterns, and coffee's cultural significance. The authors conducted quantitative marketing research to ascertain consumer perceptions, views, and attitudes regarding the visual identity components employed by businesses in the Romanian coffee market in offline and online environments. The research's findings showed that most respondents consume coffee, with a sizable portion doing so several times daily. Investing in visual identity components may make coffee brands stand out, draw in new customers and keep existing ones. The brand is significant when deciding which coffee to drink, with quality and cost also important considerations.

Key words: marketing strategies, design, packaging, coffee market, visual identity
J.E.L. classification: M31

1. Introduction

The coffee market is competitive with strong players who must use visual identity elements as part of the applied marketing policy. They contribute sustainably to increase the visibility of products on the market and convince the consumer to make the purchase decision.

If in the past visual identity elements were used mainly in the physical environment, due to the evolution of digitalization and digital marketing, their use in the virtual environment has become a necessity. For a company it is essential to synchronize the visual identity elements used in the physical environment and those used in the virtual environment (Pu et al, 2023, p.4).

Nowadays, the goal of any company is to create a strong brand using visual identity elements that are easily recognizable by consumers and that send a clear message to them. Visual identity elements are characterized by solid shape, color and graphics to make the company and its products stand out on the market (Olins, 2009, p.30).

The primary purpose of the paper was to identify the attitudes and opinions of consumers regarding the visual identity elements used in the physical and virtual environment by the companies in the coffee market in Romania. In addition, the authors also sought to identify the most important visual identity elements used by the big players in the coffee market in Romania. In this regard a quantitative marketing research has been carried out.

2. Literature review

2.1. Coffee consumption in Romania

Coffee consumption in Romania has been on the rise recently, with many coffee shops and cafes popping up in cities and towns across the country. Various factors, including preferences for certain types of coffee, trends in coffee consumption and the role of coffee in Romanian culture, characterize the Romanian coffee market.

In terms of coffee consumption trends, the Romanian market has shifted towards specialty coffee in recent years. Specialty coffee refers to coffee made from high-quality beans grown and processed using sustainable methods. It is often roasted in small batches and has a distinct flavor profile. Many coffee shops and cafes in Romania now offer specialty coffee drinks and some even roast their beans in-house (Neacșu, 2020, p.111).

Another trend in the Romanian coffee market is the rise of third-wave coffee shops. It refers to a movement that emphasizes the quality and craft of coffee making. These shops often focus on single-origin coffee and offer a variety of brewing methods, such as pour-over or French press. They also strongly emphasize the sourcing and roasting of their beans, often working directly with coffee farmers and cooperatives to ensure fair prices and sustainable practices (Perfect Daily Grind, 2017).

Despite the growing interest in specialty coffee, traditional coffee shops and cafes continue to be popular in Romania. These establishments typically serve a range of coffee drinks, pastries and other snacks. They often have a cozy and welcoming atmosphere and many view them as important social spaces where they can meet with friends and family (Wang, 2022, p.24). Coffee also plays an important role in Romanian culture. It is often a welcoming gesture to guests in homes and businesses and is considered an essential part of hospitality. Many Romanians also enjoy coffee breaks during the workday.

Regarding the direction of the Romanian coffee market, the trend toward specialty coffee and third-wave coffee shops will likely continue. Consumers are becoming more interested in the quality and sustainability of their coffee and are willing to pay a premium for high-quality beans and unique brewing methods. However, traditional coffee shops and cafes will also remain popular, particularly in smaller towns and villages where they play an essential role in community life. As mentioned by (Maciejewski *et al*, 2019, p.140) “consumers expect coffee that is easy to prepare, even ready for immediate consumption, high quality and yet affordable. Coffee which will stimulate you, but also improve the time spent at work or with friends. Coffee which entertains with its unusual combinations and intrigues with its original technological solutions. The actions of coffee producers and sellers responding to these expectations take the form of product trends.”

Overall, the Romanian coffee market is diverse and dynamic, with various preferences and trends shaping its direction.

2.2. Coffee brands present in Romania

The coffee market in Romania has experienced significant growth in recent years, with a diverse range of international and local brands available to consumers. The market is characterized by a strong presence of Italian and German coffee brands, which offer a range of products, including whole bean, ground, and capsule options (Capital, 2023). Lavazza, Jacobs, Nescafe, Illy, Segafredo, and Tchibo are Romania's most popular international brands. However, there is also a growing interest in local Romanian coffee brands, such as Doncafe or Cafea Fortuna. These brands offer a range of products, including whole bean, ground and instant coffee, as well as coffee capsules and pods (Gros, 2022).

The direction of the Romanian coffee market is towards greater diversity and specialization, with consumers showing an increasing interest in high-quality, specialty coffees and unique brewing methods (Ferro, 2022). As the coffee culture in Romania continues to develop, there is potential for local coffee brands and specialty roasters to gain greater prominence and recognition. Furthermore, the increasing popularity of online sales channels and home brewing equipment may also provide opportunities for smaller coffee brands to reach a wider audience.

The Romanian coffee market is characterized by a wide range of international and local brands, reflecting the country's diverse coffee culture. As the market continues to evolve, it will be interesting to see how local brands and specialty roasters adapt to changing consumer preferences and compete with established international brands.

2.3. Visual identity elements used by coffee brands

Visual elements are crucial in building a coffee brand's identity and creating a memorable customer experience. Coffee brands use various visual elements to distinguish themselves from their competitors and convey their values to consumers. These elements can include the brand logo, packaging design, color schemes, typography and imagery. (Mergillano, *et al*, 2022, p.336) states that they bring "creativity and branding together, giving consumers visual elements that reflect their feelings about a company or brand. These attributes are not only for creative purposes. It also provides instant recognition to some brands, and many combinations can be used depending on the type of advertisement a brand will be producing".

One of the essential visual elements used by coffee brands is their logo. The logo is the primary symbol representing the brand and is often the first thing customers notice. Many coffee brands have distinct logos that feature coffee-related imagery, such as coffee beans, cups or steam. Some logos also uniquely and recognizably incorporate the brand using a specific font or color scheme (Agustin, 2021, p.2).

Packaging design is another important visual element used by coffee brands. The packaging design must be visually appealing and communicate the brand's values and quality to customers. Many coffee brands use earthy and natural color schemes to convey a sense of authenticity and quality, while others use bright and bold colors to stand out on store shelves. The packaging design may also feature coffee-related imagery, such as illustrations of coffee beans or brewing methods (Swasty *et al*, 2021, p.1).

Graphic is another visual element used by coffee brands to convey their identity. The font used for the brand name and other text on the packaging or promotional materials can evoke different emotions and associations in customers. For example, a bold and modern font may suggest innovation and cutting-edge quality, while a more traditional and ornate font may convey a sense of history and tradition. Imagery is another important visual element used by coffee brands to communicate their values and create an emotional connection with customers. Many coffee brands use imagery that evokes the coffee production process, such as photos of coffee beans or farmers. This imagery can help convey a sense of authenticity and ethical sourcing practices. Other coffee brands may use imagery more focused on the customer experience, such as photos of people enjoying coffee in a cozy cafe or socializing with friends over a cup of coffee (Sousa, 2020, p.2).

Visual elements are essential for coffee brands in online communications. They are arguably more important online than physical retail due to the digital space's highly competitive and visually-driven nature.

Firstly, the internet is a highly visual medium and images and videos tend to receive more engagement and attention from consumers than text-based content. Coffee brands must use visual elements effectively to capture their audience's attention and communicate their message. Secondly, online platforms such as social media and e-commerce websites offer coffee brands the opportunity to showcase their visual elements in a highly curated and controlled way. Brands can use high-quality product photography, videos, and graphics to create a consistent and appealing visual identity across their online channels. This can help create a sense of trust and credibility with customers, who are likelier to engage with brands that present a professional and visually appealing image online. Thirdly, visual elements can help coffee brands stand out in a crowded online marketplace. With so many coffee brands vying for consumers' attention online, a visually compelling and distinctive brand identity can help a brand differentiate itself from its competitors and create a lasting impression in customers' minds (Park *et al*, 2022).

Visual elements can help coffee brands to communicate their values and build an emotional connection with customers online. By using imagery and videos that convey a brand's ethical and sustainability values, they can create a sense of purpose and engagement with customers who share these values (Chaffey *et al*, 2019, p.152)

Overall, visual elements are crucial for coffee brands in online communications. By using high-quality imagery, videos, and graphics, brands can capture their audience's attention, differentiate themselves from competitors, communicate their values and build a lasting emotional connection with customers.

Considering all the aspects mentioned above, the research questions that emerge are: What factors influence consumers in choosing a particular coffee brand in the Romanian market? What is the role of visual identity elements in the virtual environment for coffee companies in Romania, and how do consumers perceive this role? How effectively do coffee companies use the visual identity elements in Romania to create a positive brand image? The research questions aim to gain insight into Romanian coffee consumers' opinions, attitudes and perceptions towards the coffee market and the visual identity elements used by coffee companies both online and offline.

3. Research methodology

In order to determine the opinions, perceptions and attitudes of consumers regarding the visual identity elements used in the offline and online environment by the companies in the Romanian coffee market, the authors conducted a quantitative marketing research.

Given the topic of the paper and the research questions identified, the survey conducted was based on the following objectives:

O1 – identifying respondents' opinions on the coffee market and the reasons for choosing a particular brand.

O2 - identifying the respondents' opinions and attitudes toward the visual identity elements used in the offline and online environment by the companies in the Romanian coffee market.

O3 - determining the respondents' perception of the place and the role of visual identity elements in the virtual environment.

The research method used was the online survey, the data collection tool was the computer-administered questionnaire (CAWI: computer-assisted Web interviewing). The questionnaire included 24 questions, 19 of which concerned the collection of information on the analyzed topic, namely the opinions and attitudes of the population questioned on the visual identity elements used offline and online by the companies in the coffee market, and the final five questions collected the data necessary for the characterization of the respondents.

Given the exploratory nature of the research and the large geographical dispersion, the aim was to obtain as many questionnaires as possible completed by consumers. The study was conducted on a sample of 602 consumers, structured as follows: 53.5% women, 46.5% men, out of which 66.1% came from urban medium and 33.9% from rural one. The age of the surveyed subjects is presented in Table 1, the majority of the people surveyed (31.23%) had ages between 36 to 50 years, followed by those with ages of 25 to 35 years (23.42%).

Table no. 1 Descriptive information of survey participants

Categories		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Under 25 years	113	18.77	18.77	18.77
	25 - 35 years	141	23.42	23.42	42.19
	36 – 50 years	188	31.23	31.23	73.42
	51 – 65 years	102	16.94	16.94	90.36
	Over 65 years	58	9.64	9.64	100.0
Total		602	100.0	100.0	

Source: Authors' own research

The data was analyzed using the IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) program. The authors have fully organized and supervised the research process, from the development of the questionnaire to the data analysis.

4. Findings

In order to be competitive and productive, companies in the coffee market need to adopt elements of visual identity as diverse and ingenious as possible, both offline and online. With these elements, companies communicate the preliminary information to potential buyers and guide them in purchasing decisions.

The authors also analyzed the main visual identity elements for the most famous brands in the coffee market in Romania: Jacobs, Lavazza, Nescafe and Tchibo.

Jacobs is the leader of the Romanian coffee market and one of the most important players in the production and distribution of coffee. In physical and virtual environments, Jacobs mainly uses green and gold to promote itself. Green is a color associated with financial relationships and expresses concentration, security, and introspection. Gold is associated with luxury and elegance. Jacobs is identified by a logo in which a crown is symbolized at the base of a coffee bean and the company name is written in capital letters to stand out. The crown is a solar symbol, this is offered to the winners and signifies their victory (Jacobs, 2023).

Lavazza is an Italian coffee that has made itself known on the Romanian market, becoming one of the consumers' preferences, being second only to Jacobs. Lavazza also focuses on offline and online communication with consumers, so it uses an attractive and colorful design depending on the type of coffee. It uses several colors on the packaging, mostly red and blue, followed by gray (suggests financial support and strength), black (gives the impression of depth), brown, gold, purple and pink. Red is an intense color and quickly captures attention. This color has a stimulating effect on buyers because it tends to stimulate and guide them to action. Blue is a soothing color; it encourages calm and reverie, inner peace and seriousness, and suggests the thirst for knowledge. Lavazza identifies itself with the company logo, in which the blue color gives a sense of tranquility and guides consumers to purchase the products they sell. The company's name is written in capital letters in the foreground, and below it is the city and country of origin, as well as the year in which it started selling coffee (Lavazza, 2023).

Nescafe is the third-highest consumer brand in the world, belongs to Nestle and has been sold in Switzerland since 1938. Nescafe also focuses on communication with the consumer so it uses an attractive and colorful design depending on the type of coffee and the message it wants to convey. Thus, it uses several colors, red and gold are most often used, followed by blue, brown, orange, green, and yellow. Red is a strong color and quickly captures attention, incites action and shopping, and suggests abundance and luxury. Nescafe is identified with the company logo in which white noncolor is used, meaning purity and new, and the accent from “E” is red. The company's name is written in capital letters in the foreground to make it stand out (Nescafe, 2023).

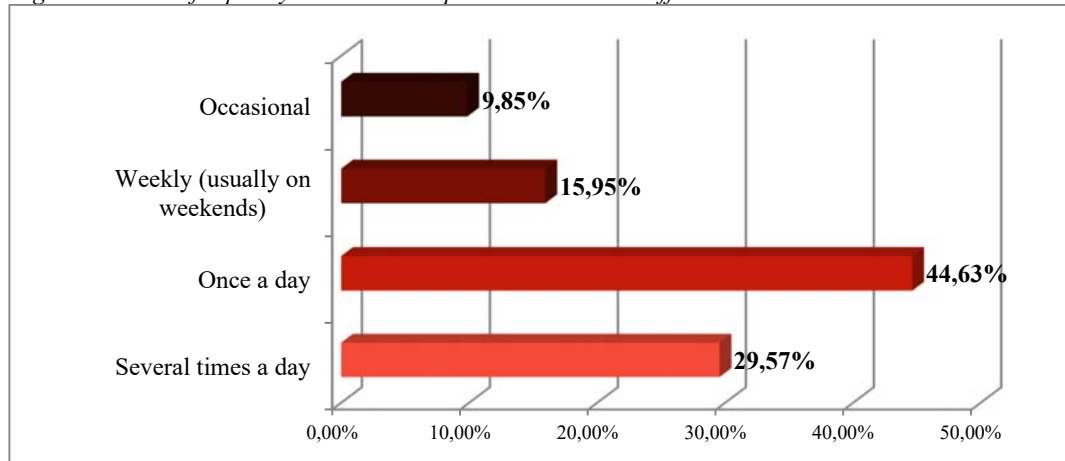
Tchibo is a German coffee company founded in 1949. In offline communication, it uses a modern design with commercial graphics, with the image of a cup of coffee on the packaging of the capsules and three coffee beans being present on the coffee packaging. It also uses an attractive and colorful design depending on the type of coffee. In the physical and digital environments, the main element of visual identity used by Tchibo is the color blue, a soothing but powerful color that suggests elegance and seriousness. Tchibo is identified with the logo of the company written calligraphically, and above we find a coffee bean combined with the letter “s” to give the smell of aroma transmission (Tchibo, 2023).

Next, the quantitative research results are presented and structured on each of the objectives mentioned above.

O1 – identifying respondents’ opinions on the coffee market and the reasons for choosing a particular brand.

Of the total respondents, only 5.65% said they were not coffee drinkers. Respondents who said they were coffee drinkers (94.35%) were asked to specify how often they drank coffee (fig.1). 29.57% reported drinking coffee several times a day, 44.63% once a day, 15.95% weekly (usually on weekends) and 9.85% occasionally.

Figure no. 1. The frequency with which respondents consume coffee

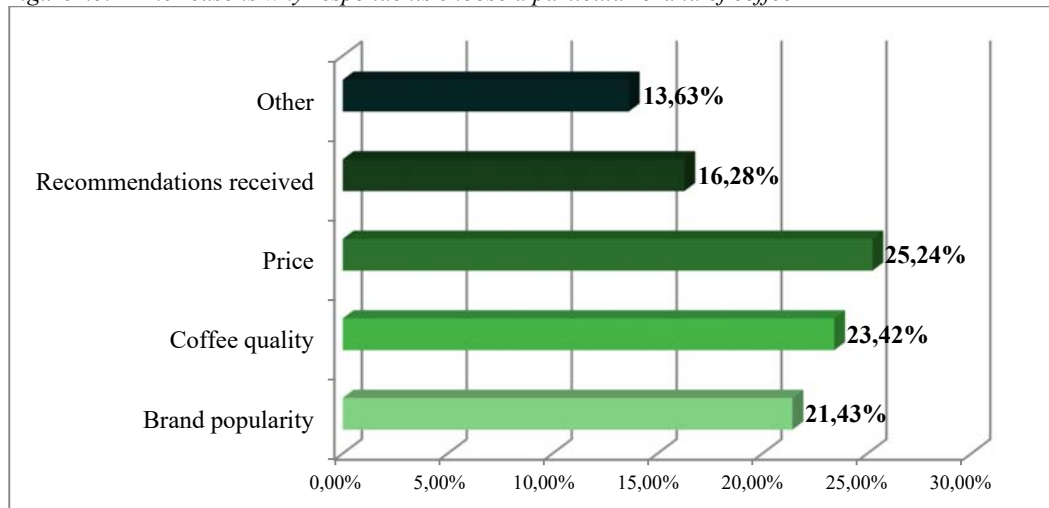


Source: Authors' own research

Of the respondents, a large proportion (71.59%) believe that the brand is important when choosing which coffee they want to consume. The authors wanted to identify the reasons for choosing a specific coffee brand by the respondents (fig. 2).

Also, 21.43% of the respondents said they chose coffee based on the brand's popularity, 23.42% chose it according to the quality of the coffee, 25.24% chose it according to the price and 16.28% chose it according to the recommendations received.

Figure no. 2 The reasons why respondents choose a particular brand of coffee



Source: Authors' own research

O2 – identifying the respondents' opinions and attitudes toward the visual identity elements used in the offline and online environment by the companies in the Romanian coffee market.

Further to the study, the authors wanted to identify the subjects' perceptions and opinions on the importance of visual identification elements used in the online and offline environment (table 2). Thus, referring to the market of the image, the respondents were asked to assess the importance of the most known visual identity elements in the physical environment and the virtual environment.

Table no. 2 The importance of visual identity elements

Characteristic	Not important at all (1)	Not important (2)	Moderately important (3)	Important (4)	Very important (5)	Scor
Offline environment						
1.Colour	4	59	130	218	191	3.89
2.Graphic	96	128	135	179	64	2.98
3.Shape	29	45	156	206	166	3.72
4.Text (message)	52	68	154	185	143	3.49
5.Logo	22	51	148	208	173	3.76
Online environment						
1.Colour	15	74	135	207	171	3.74
2.Graphic	16	31	120	241	194	3.96
3.Shape	307	141	128	26	0	1.79
4.Text (message)	12	58	129	209	194	3.86
5.Logo	28	61	142	203	168	3.70

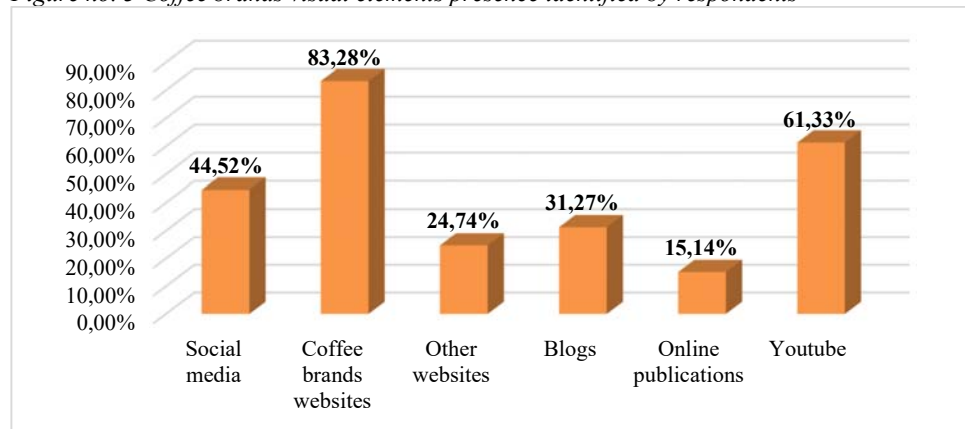
Source: Authors’ own research

The data processing revealed that for the subjects, the most important elements of the visual identity in the offline environment were color (3.89 scores), logo (3.76 scores) and shape (3.72 scores). The text (3.49 scores) and graphic elements (2.98 scores) were considered less significant when evaluating their importance in offline circumstances. When comparing the online environment importance of the same elements of visual identity, the results emphasized as most important the graphic (3.96 scores) and message (3.86 scores), followed by colour (3.74 scores) and logo (3.70 scores). The shape was considered the least important element (1.79 scores).

03 – determining the respondents’ perception of the place and the role of visual identity elements in the virtual environment.

Most respondents (91.2%) mentioned noticing the visual identity elements of various coffee brands in the online environment. The subjects were also asked to select the online channels where they saw these elements, the results are presented in fig. 3.

Figure no. 3 Coffee brands visual elements presence identified by respondents



Source: Authors’ own research

The channel which the respondents most selected was the coffee brand's website (83.28%), followed by YouTube (61.33%) and social media channels (44.52%). The smallest percentages were obtained by blogs (31.27%), other websites (24.74%) and various online publications (15.14%).

In an industry with intense competition, a well-designed visual identity can help a coffee brand stand out from the crowd and attract and retain loyal customers. Elements such as logos, graphic, colors and messages can create a brand personality that resonates with the target audience.

Consistency in visual identity elements across various touchpoints, such as packaging, websites, and social media, can also reinforce brand identity and build trust with consumers. Investing in visual identity elements that appeal to the target audience can increase brand recognition, customer loyalty and revenue in the competitive coffee industry.

5. Conclusions

The research findings reveal that most respondents are coffee drinkers, with a significant proportion consuming coffee several times a day. The brand is essential when choosing which coffee to consume, with quality and price also playing a significant role.

The study shows that the most important visual identity elements in the offline environment are color, logo, and shape. At the same time, graphics and messages are considered the most significant elements in the online environment. The coffee brand's website, YouTube, and social media channels are the most common online platforms where consumers notice visual identity elements. These findings suggest that a well-designed visual identity is essential in the coffee industry. Investing in visual identity elements can help coffee brands stand out and attract and retain loyal customers.

Also, based on the research findings, coffee brands in Romania should prioritize developing a strong visual identity that appeals to offline and online consumers. The research indicates that a brand's popularity, quality, price and recommendations received are the main factors influencing consumers' coffee choices. Therefore, coffee companies should emphasize these factors in their marketing and branding strategies to attract and retain loyal customers.

Overall, the study provides valuable insights for coffee brands in Romania to enhance their branding and marketing efforts and increase their market share in the competitive coffee industry. By investing in the proper visual identity elements and effectively communicating their brand message, coffee companies can differentiate themselves from competitors and build a strong brand reputation among consumers.

The study's main setback of the paper is the inability to conduct a study using a random sample method, which prevents statistical validation of the sample and the application of the results to the entire population under consideration. However, the authors think the research brings a significant contribution to the study of the coffee market in Romania and the importance of the visual elements of the coffee brands in both online and offline environment.

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