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VISUAL CULTURE AS A SOURCE OF MANAGERIAL THINKING IN THE RESTAURANT BUSINESS

ВІЗУАЛЬНА КУЛЬТУРА ЯК ДЖЕРЕЛО УПРАВЛІНСЬКОГО МИСЛЕННЯ В РЕСТОРАННОМУ БІЗНЕСІ

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Гринько Т.В., Крупський О.П., Стасюк Ю.М. Візуальна культура як джерело управлінського мислення в ресторанному бізнесі. Науково-методична стаття.

У статті досліджено феномен візуальної культури як ключового чинника формування управлінського мислення в ресторанному бізнесі. У роботі проаналізовано кейси вітчизняних і зарубіжних ресторанних брендів, зокрема Taco Love, The Oak Stave, Chipotle, що дозволило простежити, як візуальна айдентика, послідовність візуального контенту в соціальних мережах та оформлення інтер'єру сприяють підвищенню впізнаваності, емоційного зв'язку з аудиторією та ефективності внутрішніх управлінських процедур. Результати дослідження підтверджують, що візуальна культура є джерелом управлінського мислення нового типу – такого, що базується на образному, сценарному, просторово-композиційному осмисленні управлінської діяльності. Отримані висновки можуть бути використані в подальших емпіричних дослідженнях, а також у розробці практичних рекомендацій для менеджерів ресторанного бізнесу, дизайнерів бренду та фахівців із сервісного управління.

Ключові слова: візуальний поворот, брендинг закладів, візуальні комунікації, когнітивний менеджмент, маркетинг у сфері гостинності, комунікаційні стратегії, прийняття рішень

Grynko T.V., Krupskiy O.P., Stasiuk Yu.M. Visual Culture as a Source of Managerial Thinking in the Restaurant Business. Scientific and methodical article.

This article investigates visual culture as a key factor in shaping managerial thinking within the restaurant industry. The study analyzes case examples of both Ukrainian and international restaurant brands, such as Taco Love, The Oak Stave, and Chipotle. These cases demonstrate how consistent visual identity, coherent content across social media platforms, and immersive spatial aesthetics contribute to brand recognition, emotional connection with customers, and the overall efficiency of internal management practices. The research findings support the notion that visual culture fosters a new type of managerial thinking – one grounded in imaginative, spatial, and compositional reasoning. The proposed framework opens opportunities for further empirical research and the development of practical guidelines for restaurant managers, brand designers, and service strategy professionals.

Keywords: visual turn, venue branding, visual communications, cognitive management, hospitality marketing, communication strategies, decision-making

Visual culture, as a phenomenon of modern managerial thinking, is increasingly attracting the attention of researchers, in particular in the context of service industries. The concept of the 'visual turn', which originated in the humanities and social sciences, describes the shift in research focus to images, graphic structures, visual ways of perceiving and transmitting knowledge. In the restaurant business, where a significant part of management communication is visual (interfaces, menus, instructions, SOPs), visual culture becomes a tool not only for aesthetic influence but also for strategic management. Some studies provide evidence that even the visual design of social media posts (in particular, photos of food) can influence decision-making by both consumers and management [1]. This indicates a deeper penetration of visual stimuli into motivational and regulatory behavioural patterns in the restaurant environment. Some studies emphasise that such forms of visual content as comics can not only popularise knowledge but also form new disciplinary frameworks of perception, which is especially important in the management context [2].

The shift in emphasis towards visual forms of instruction, presentations, and organisational identity is also reflected in the internal practices of staff. Graphically designed flowcharts and visualised service standards

contribute to better assimilation of management norms and procedures among restaurant industry employees [3]. Druzhynina V. and Zinchenko D. emphasise that in the context of high competition and digitalisation, it is the elements of visual content (posters, checklists, visual instructions) that are able to convey not only operational tasks but also managerial meanings [4]. Betancourt Barszcz G. came to similar conclusions when analysing approaches to management decisions in the field of food security, where risk visualisation allows for optimised decision-making [5]. Thus, visual technologies are gaining a new meaning as cognitive tools for enhancing management functions.

Against this background, the question arises: to what extent does visual culture shape managerial thinking in the restaurant business? Given the high variability of conditions, the customer focus of the industry and the role of rapid response, the study of this issue is relevant and scientifically significant. The purpose of the article is to analyse visual culture as a source of managerial thinking in restaurants, with a focus on visual tools and narratives that function in internal management. Additionally, it is expected to identify the impact of such visual elements on the speed of decision-making, communication efficiency and stability of organisational behaviour. The novelty of the work lies in the interdisciplinary approach: a combination of visual studies, organisational management and restaurant administration practices.

The purpose of the study is to determine the role of visual culture as a source of managerial thinking in the restaurant business, in particular through a comprehensive analysis of the impact of visual elements on branding, marketing, organisational identity and operational management strategies. Particular attention is paid to how visual content, such as photographs of dishes, space design, graphic standards and digital media, contributes to management decision-making, forming an emotional connection with customers and maintaining team interaction in a competitive environment.

Analysis of recent researches and publications

The evolution of visual culture in the restaurant business is directly related to the changing dynamics of consumer behaviour and the development of digital technologies. In today's digital age, visual content is of paramount importance, as it is through visual images that restaurants seek to attract potential customers and create a unique, emotionally charged first impression [6, 7]. This shift in emphasis underscores the need to integrate strong visual elements into marketing strategies, especially with the growing influence of smartphones and social media, which have radically changed the channels of interaction with the target audience [8, 9].

From a historical perspective, the art of visual communication has deep roots in local cultural traditions. In particular, restaurant identities, graphic images, and overall brand styling often draw inspiration from regional aesthetics, local culture, and gastronomic customs. This is manifested in the choice of colour schemes, design and thematic visual elements that reflect the environment and authentic culinary identity, which generally enhances the emotional impression of visiting the establishment [10]. In addition, modern research emphasises that visuals, in particular narrative forms such as comics, can effectively perform the function of translating organisational culture by adapting local codes to understandable and recognisable visual scenarios, which increases the brand's impact on internal and external audiences [11].

In addition to the marketing function, visual management systems have evolved to become a critical component of restaurant operations, as they allow capturing learning, improvement and experience sharing processes in the operational environment [12]. These systems provide managers and teams with the tools to document management changes, quickly communicate important decisions or adjustments during the implementation of projects and initiatives [12]. This approach not only improves mutual understanding between team members, but also positively affects the overall level of service quality and product delivery, factors that are crucial in the highly competitive hospitality industry [13].

With the increasing pace of innovation in the restaurant industry, the strategic importance of understanding the role of visual culture in making effective management decisions is also growing. Such decisions cover not only aspects of food quality and service, but also the efficiency of operations, internal communication, branding and visual positioning [14, 15]. Ultimately, such strategies help to increase customer loyalty, maintain staff engagement, and strengthen quality control [16]. Thus, in the context of the constant interaction between visual culture and management practice, it becomes obvious that the visual component is not only a design tool, but also a means of strategic thinking.

The main part

Research methodology. The study used a comprehensive interdisciplinary approach that combines methods of qualitative analysis, critical interpretation of visual content, and comparative case analysis. The methodological framework is based on the principles of visual studies, knowledge management, organisational culture, and the cognitive approach to management.

The first stage of the study involved the analysis of scientific sources (2021-2024) from Scopus, Web of Science, DOAJ, Google Scholar, and professional blogs on the role of visual content in branding, human resources management, decision-making, and customer experience. The sources were selected based on the criteria of relevance, availability of empirical results or relevant conceptual models. Particular attention was paid to publications describing the effects of the 'visual turn' in the service sector, namely the restaurant industry.

The second stage included a comparative case analysis of visual strategies of restaurant industry brands (Oak Stave, Taco Love, Chipotle, etc.), taking into account such parameters as identity style, visual positioning,

emotional communication, graphic structuring of the environment, and menu design. The analysis of the cases allowed us to identify recurring patterns, strengths of visual solutions and their impact on management decisions and organisational culture.

The third stage of the study was based on the use of elements of critical discourse analysis of visual narratives present in restaurant marketing and internal management. Not only visual media (photos, graphics, videos) were considered, but also the logic of their integration into the management system at both the representative and procedural levels (SOPs, dashboards, instructions).

The methodological novelty of the study is the transfer of the idea of a "visual turn" from the field of humanities to the field of practical restaurant business management. This approach allows us to interpret visual culture not as an external tool, but as an internal cognitive mechanism that shapes management decisions, behavioural models and organisational scenarios.

Results and discussion. The role of visual culture in the restaurant business.

Visual culture plays a key role in the modern restaurant business, significantly influencing branding, marketing approaches and customer interaction strategies. In the context of the digitalisation of the restaurant space, visual content performs not only an informational function but also serves as a tool for forming a first impression of the establishment. The phrase 'a picture is worth a thousand words' is especially important in the hospitality industry, where the image becomes the first point of contact between a brand and a potential visitor [17]. Visual elements are able to instantly capture attention, arouse interest and emotional involvement, which determines further consumer behaviour [18]. Thus, the integration of visual content is not an optional component, but a prerequisite for the competitiveness of a restaurant.

Modern marketing in the restaurant business demonstrates the rapid growth of the importance of visual content marketing, which is especially effective in social media. The use of high-quality photographs, videos, and graphic design of menus and promotional materials forms not only the external attractiveness but also the integral visual identity of the establishment [19]. This approach allows you to create emotionally rich narratives that spread quickly in the digital environment, stimulating discussion, sharing and increasing brand awareness [20]. Food photography, a specialised industry that focuses on the aesthetics of food presentation, is a particularly powerful tool in this context. Careful work with lighting, composition, and colour allows you to convey the texture, temperature, and appetite of a dish, creating an emotional impression that stimulates the desire to try the product [20].

Branding in the restaurant industry goes beyond logos or colour schemes - it encompasses the entire visual identity of the establishment. This includes the atmosphere, interior design, menu design, behavioural style of the staff, and even the synesthetic experience that arises during a visit to a restaurant [21]. A well-formed visual identity communicates with the client on a subconscious level, conveying the concept, values and style of the establishment. Studies show that visually based branding can evoke memories, emotions and affection, which contributes to the formation of a strong emotional connection between the restaurant and its audience [6, 22]. In a highly competitive market, it is the depth of this connection that often determines whether a customer will return again.

The impact of visual culture on managerial thinking. The formation of managerial thinking in the restaurant business directly depends on the depth of managers' understanding of not only operational processes, but also market behavioural patterns, service standards and customer interaction contexts. Effective management requires that teams are not only informed, but also actively involved in transforming knowledge into practical action based on quality, responsibility and professional pride [23]. Such an approach requires continuous improvement and learning, which can be measured through various indicators: reject rates, customer satisfaction, team climate, and innovation activity indices. Ignoring continuous improvement processes can lead to staff demotivation, reduced productivity, and a sense of redundancy. Studies show that low engagement is often not a result of a lack of professionalism, but rather a reflection of limited opportunities for self-realisation [23]. Visual tools, such as graphic plans, digital dashboards, or visualised work standards, contribute to greater transparency of processes, understanding of the overall goal, and the formation of leadership logic in the team [24].

In the digital era, visual content has become one of the central carriers of a restaurant's brand identity, playing a role not only in marketing but also in management decisions. In a saturated market, it is high-quality visual materials (images, videos, branded layouts) that help a restaurant stand out and clearly communicate its unique offer [25]. Modern research confirms that the human brain processes visual information 60,000 times faster than textual information, which enhances the effect of visual perception in communication strategies [18]. That's why the image of a dish or restaurant space seen on social media is often crucial for a consumer's choice. High-quality visual content activates emotional interaction, creates a desire to gain relevant experience, and thus increases customer satisfaction and loyalty [26]. Visualisation of the environment and product not only shapes customer expectations, but also reconfigures the manager's thinking, forcing him or her to take visual strategies into account when making key decisions [27].

Visual culture in branding, management and consumer experience practices. The use of visual culture in the restaurant business has become a full-fledged strategic resource that is actively used in both external marketing practices and internal management. Practical cases, such as The Oak Stave, Taco Love, and Chipotle, demonstrate that a coherent visual identity, which includes logo, style, visual elements of the interior, and online communication, is the key to brand recognition, brand appeal, and long-term audience loyalty [28-33].

At the same time, the implementation of visual strategies is accompanied by both advantages and difficulties. These aspects are systematised in Table 1, which demonstrates the strengths and weaknesses of using visual culture in restaurants.

Table 1. Strengths and weaknesses of implementing visual culture in restaurants

Aspect	Strengths	Weaknesses
Visual Branding	Builds recognition and trust [30, 33]	Inconsistent application across different platforms [22]
Visual Content in Social Media	Creates viral effect, enhances customer loyalty [9, 28]	Difficulty in maintaining consistent quality [34]
Menu Design	Stimulates desire to try, reinforces branding [31]	Often lags behind changes in the menu offerings [29]
Visual Management (Dashboards)	Enhances clarity and transparency of goals [35]	Requires staff training and a supportive digital culture [36]
Unified Visual Identity	Increases conversion, facilitates scalability [20]	Risk of "visual fatigue" without regular creative updates [37, 38]

Source: compiled by authors on materials [9, 20, 22, 29, 30-38]

As can be seen from Table 1, most of the advantages relate to emotional appeal, recognition and increased communication efficiency, while the weaknesses are mostly related to technical or procedural barriers that can be overcome through management support and a systematic approach.

Successful implementation of visual strategies is possible by studying practical examples of brands that successfully use visual culture. For this purpose, Table 2 below provides a brief overview of the cases of well-known restaurants.

Table 2. Key examples of brands and their visual strategies

Brand/Case Name	Main Visual Culture Focus	Result/Impact
The Oak Stave [30]	Consistent branding + online presence	Improved customer engagement
Taco Love [33]	Bold identity (logo, color palette)	Strong recognition among target audience
Chipotle [32]	Culturally marked identity	Creation of a loyal customer community
Innovative Menu [29, 31]	Design and navigation	Influence on customer decision-making
Instagram Platforms [28, 38]	Food photography, stories, videos	Rapid content distribution, attraction of new customers

Source: compiled by authors on materials [28, 29, 30-33, 38]

These examples demonstrate that systematic work with visual identity, not just aestheticisation of individual elements, is crucial for creating a lasting consumer connection. Brands that apply coherent, authentic visual strategies not only attract attention, but also form their own visual language that is understandable and recognisable to their target audience.

Visual culture as the basis of management thinking in the age of the visual turn. The modern restaurant business is undergoing not only a digital but also a cognitive transformation of management practices, which takes the form of a visual turn – a global change in the way of thinking in which images, visual structures and aesthetic forms become the main carrier of content, communication and management decisions. In the context of this shift, traditional management tools are increasingly giving way to visual influence scenarios that combine the functions of representation, control, emotional resonance and motivation. Thus, visual culture is becoming not just a design tool, but a space for the birth of managerial meaning. Below are recommendations that demonstrate how the visual turn is manifested in daily management practice.

One of the key manifestations of the visual turn is the rethinking of visual identity as a management category. Identity is not just a logo and colour palette, but a visual model for organising thinking about a brand, its audience, values, and promises. The case of Taco Love convincingly demonstrates how a visual system can create an emotional framework of trust and belonging [33]. The creation of a brand book is no longer a design practice, but the institutionalisation of a management sequence that provides a logic of actions at all levels: from SMM to menu design [22]. Through visual consistency, a brand is not only recognisable – it manages expectations.

Within internal management, the visual turn is manifested in the transition from textual instructions to visual management models: graphs, infographics, dashboards, process maps. These are not just convenient formats, they are new forms of thinking that allow you to see the whole, capture patterns and form horizontal relationships in the team [35]. Successful practices demonstrate that dashboards with visual displays of metrics (NPS, service time, repeat visits) not only help track performance, but also turn indicators into shared management values that are discussed, understood and adjusted using visual language [36].

At the level of external communication, visual content becomes not an extension of marketing, but the core of customer experience management. In the Instagram economy, an image not only presents a product, but also shapes the reality that the client wants to enter [28]. Managers who understand the mechanisms of visual influence manage not only creativity but also consumer trajectories: the image becomes a behavioural trigger, a means of audience

segmentation, and a loyalty tool [27, 39]. Visual culture is a management technology that combines aesthetics with behavioural economics.

Thus, in the context of the visual turn, managerial thinking in the restaurant business requires a new literacy - the ability to read, create and interpret visual structures not as a supplement, but as a managerial basis. Visual culture does not only arrange the content, it organises thinking, structures reality and shapes the future of the establishment. Therefore, a new generation manager must be not only a strategist or administrator, but also a visual architect of meaning, capable of transforming visions into images and images into solutions.

Motivational Preconditions of Visual Thinking in Restaurant Management Practices.

In the context of rapid digitalization and saturated visual environments, restaurant managers are increasingly expected to operate not only as strategists but also as visual thinkers. This shift is not purely aesthetic but rather motivational in nature: visual modes of planning and communication respond to internal managerial needs for clarity, speed, and emotional engagement [40]. The capacity to visualize operations, service flows, or strategic intent allows leaders to externalize abstract logic in concrete, shareable formats, such as dashboards, infographics, and branded layouts. Visual tools thus act not merely as representations, but as motivational frameworks for initiating and sustaining organizational change [41]. As a result, visual thinking becomes embedded in leadership routines, shaping both cognitive and affective aspects of decision-making.

Recent studies have also highlighted the motivational impact of visual thinking in education and innovation contexts. Training in visual storytelling, for instance, has been shown to enhance creative self-efficacy and motivation in design and STEM-related fields [42]. Similarly, the implementation of visual thinking strategies and cooperative learning in business education fosters stronger engagement and greater retention of managerial skills [43]. Within the restaurant industry, these insights correspond with the observed managerial preference for intuitive, image-based coordination systems. Visualization supports motivational clarity, making expectations more accessible and promoting alignment across teams. In doing so, managers not only instruct but also inspire.

Moreover, visual thinking aligns with responsible leadership practices that emphasize ethical commitment and long-term sustainability. Motivated by a desire to lead meaningfully, many hospitality professionals now incorporate visual systems to communicate environmental and social responsibility, such as food waste dashboards or sourcing visuals [44, 45]. These visual components act as symbolic anchors for team values, transforming ethical objectives into visible, routine-driven behavior. Managers using such tools report stronger coherence between vision and execution, suggesting that motivation is not limited to performance incentives but extends to identification with visualized purpose and values.

Finally, visual thinking enables managers to construct emotionally engaging and collaborative environments. Hospitality teams, often operating under pressure, benefit from visual clarity, expressive formats, and design-rich settings that foster motivation through aesthetic and cognitive resonance [46]. Leaders who employ visual cues and symbolic systems are not simply managing tasks; they are shaping the emotional architecture of work. This motivational dimension of visual management supports staff creativity, reduces ambiguity, and strengthens collective engagement. To synthesize these interrelated motivational factors, Table 3 outlines the primary drivers that encourage managers to integrate visual thinking into their operational and strategic logic.

Table 3. Motivational Preconditions of Visual Thinking in Restaurant Management

Motivational Factor	Description	Operational Expression
Cognitive compression [40]	Synthesizing complex organizational structures into accessible formats	Dashboards, SOP infographics
Creative self-efficacy [42]	Enhancing confidence and ideation through visual techniques	Sketching, concept boards, creative planning maps
Responsible leadership [44, 45]	Aligning managerial behavior with ethical and sustainable goals	Sustainability visuals, food waste tracking systems
Emotional resonance [46]	Evoking aesthetic and emotional engagement within teams	Mood boards, expressive brand storytelling, design atmospheres
Collaborative clarity [43]	Strengthening communication and reducing ambiguity via shared visual language	Visual workflows, branded documentation, group mapping

Source: compiled by authors on materials [40, 42-46]

Taken together, the motivational factors outlined in Table 3 reaffirm that visual thinking is not a superficial layer of modern management but an integral motivational structure embedded in leadership behavior. It stimulates ethical awareness, fosters creative initiative, and enhances team cohesion by transforming abstract objectives into engaging, shareable, and emotionally resonant formats. In the restaurant business – where immediacy, affective engagement, and service fluidity are paramount - these visual strategies meet core motivational needs of managers facing complex operational and branding challenges. By integrating visual language into decision-making, managers align their intentions with both functional clarity and symbolic meaning. This motivational alignment underlines the central argument of the study: that visual culture functions as a generative matrix of managerial thinking, allowing leaders not only to manage more effectively but also to think more fully through the lens of visual logic.

Conclusions

The conducted research has made it possible to substantiate the thesis that visual culture in the restaurant business performs not only the function of external communication, but also acts as a full-fledged source of managerial thinking. In the context of the 'visual turn' in social and management sciences, images, graphic structures, visual interfaces and aesthetic narratives are transformed into cognitive models that determine the logic of decision-making, goal setting and organisational behaviour.

An analysis of case studies, modern practices of visual branding, internal management and digital communications has shown that visual culture in restaurants is implemented through such management vectors as identity formation, visual structuring of processes, graphic instruction, environment design, and social media narratives. These components are not side elements of the organisation; they perform the functions of planning, control, motivation, diagnostics and regulation, i.e. they cover the key management functions.

It is particularly telling that modern managers increasingly think in terms of images, scenarios and compositions, instead of classic textual protocols or instructions. This indicates the growing role of visual literacy as a managerial competence and highlights the need to develop methodological, educational and technological solutions that will help to consolidate visual culture as part of strategic thinking in the restaurant environment.

Thus, the results of the study confirm the relevance and prospects of studying visual culture as a structuring environment of hospitality management. In the future, this opens up opportunities for interdisciplinary research at the intersection of visual studies, management, cognitive science and cultural studies, as well as for the introduction of new visual management tools into the practice of restaurant administration. Furthermore, the study highlights that the integration of visual tools into managerial routines is not solely driven by operational logic but is underpinned by a distinct motivational structure. Managers are increasingly drawn to visual thinking because it satisfies cognitive, emotional, and ethical needs within high-pressure service environments. This motivational turn in managerial logic reinforces the argument that visual culture serves not just a communicative function, but also acts as a source of internal managerial alignment and leadership identity.

Abstract

This article investigates visual culture as a key factor in shaping managerial thinking within the restaurant industry. Using an interdisciplinary approach that integrates management theory, visual studies, and organizational culture analysis, the authors argue that visual elements – ranging from branding and food photography to spatial design and graphic instructions – serve not only communicative but also cognitive and managerial functions. In the context of the "visual turn" in the social sciences, these elements increasingly influence decision-making, staff coordination, customer interaction, and strategic positioning of hospitality establishments.

The study analyzes case examples of both Ukrainian and international restaurant brands, such as Taco Love, The Oak Stave, and Chipotle. These cases demonstrate how consistent visual identity, coherent content across social media platforms, and immersive spatial aesthetics contribute to brand recognition, emotional connection with customers, and the overall efficiency of internal management practices. It is shown that modern visual strategies go far beyond aesthetics, embedding themselves in personnel training systems, service standards, performance dashboards, and organizational behavior models.

The research findings support the notion that visual culture fosters a new type of managerial thinking – one grounded in imaginative, spatial, and compositional reasoning. The article proposes reinterpreting visual culture not merely as a tool of external marketing but as an internal logic of organization capable of constructing behavioral patterns, strengthening employee and customer loyalty, and supporting consistent decision-making. The proposed framework opens opportunities for further empirical research and the development of practical guidelines for restaurant managers, brand designers, and service strategy professionals.

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