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## **The role of visual identity and student content co-creation in strengthening school brand perception**

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### **Abstract**

The authors analyse the visual identity and communication of educational institutions in the process of building their brand and promoting themselves to the public. The theoretical framework addresses topics such as visual identity, school branding, and graduate participation in the creation of social media content as a factor strengthening identification with the school brand. The empirical part is based on quantitative research conducted through an online questionnaire on a sample of 390 high school graduates. The results point to a positive correlation between the perceived quality of visual communication and the evaluation of school promotion, as well as the importance of active co-creation of content on social networks in shaping graduates' emotional relationship to the school brand.

**Keywords:** marketing in education, visual communication, social media  
**Jel codes:** M31, M37

### **1. Introduction**

Visual identity is a fundamental element of organisational communication, through which organisations differentiate themselves from other entities (Dowling, 1994) and shape their recognisability, perception and long-term impact on the public (Aaker, 2003). People generally process visual information faster and more intuitively than verbal information. Visual stimuli can attract attention in a short period of time and often remain in the memory longer, which strengthens their communicative effect (Liu et al, 2025). In the context of digital media, Fekete (2022) works with the concept of digital visual identity.

Visual identity plays an important role in creating a clear, consistent and memorable image of an organisation. A unified system of elements such as a logo, colour palette, typography and communication material design helps recipients immediately identify a brand and distinguish it from its competitors (Aaker, 2003).

Visual identity is a tool that facilitates orientation in the information environment, promotes emotional connection with the brand and increases the effectiveness of promotion. In an environment where visual content



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dominates, the importance of visual identity is further enhanced – from websites and social media to offline materials and spatial design. Organisations that are able to work with visual identity strategically and consistently gain an advantage in their ability to attract, differentiate themselves and retain the attention of their target groups (compare Ptačin and Čábyová, 2016; Čábyová et al, 2022). The paper also focuses on analysing whether student participation in the creation of school content contributes to strengthening their emotional relationship and identification with the school brand.

## 2. Literature Review

Visual identity is a fundamental tool through which organisations communicate their values, identity and culture to the public. In the context of educational institutions, it promotes the school's recognisability, shapes its image and strengthens emotional ties with students and graduates. According to Melewar (2001), a company's visual identity consists of its name, logo and/or symbol, typography and colours. In educational institutions, visual identity can be seen as a strategic communication tool through which schools convey their values, traditions and academic culture to both the external and internal environment. As Balmer, and Podnar (2021) point out, visual identity is part of the broader concept of corporate brand identity, which serves to unify the internal and external image of an organisation.

As already mentioned, within educational institutions, visual communication is not limited to logos and the use of colours, but includes a whole system of visual elements such as website design, promotional materials, social media, school premises, student events, publications, printed materials, forms, presentation templates. These elements form a visual language that helps to create the school's recognisability and reputation. Van den Bosch et al. (2006) emphasise that consistent use of visual identity increases the perceived professionalism of an organisation and contributes to the formation of its credibility. According to Čábyová et al. (2020), the visual identity of an educational institution and its perception can increase the value of the institution and its products, but it can also decrease it. When designing it, it is necessary to respect the differences between the individual target groups affected by visual communication (students, graduates, employees, applicants for study).

Chapleo (2015) states that building a school brand is increasingly comparable to building commercial brands, with visual communication representing the first point of contact between the school and its potential students. A modern and consistent visual style can contribute to increasing the attractiveness of the school, making it more memorable and strengthening its position in the education market (Judson et al., 2008).

In terms of visual identity and school promotion, student participation in media content creation also plays an important role. By getting involved in the production of photographs, articles and videos, students not only participate in the life of the institution, but also strengthen their relationship with the school's brand. Such active participation fosters a sense of belonging to the school, a more personal contribution and identifies the student with the values of the organisation.

Brand engagement refers to a state in which the consumer is psychologically involved in interacting with the brand or its community. This state can vary in intensity and depends on the specific context. It includes three main components: cognitive – how the consumer thinks about the brand, emotional – what feelings they experience towards the brand, and behavioural – specific activities or interactions with the brand (Brodie et al., 2013). The claim that brand engagement includes cognitive, emotional and behavioural components is also confirmed by Razmus (2021), who states that consumers engage positively with a brand by thinking about it, experiencing positive emotions, and taking active actions such as sharing content or participating in brand communities.

Naeem and Okafor (2022) argue that user-generated content plays an important role in building brand interaction. According to them, user-generated content allows consumers to create content that evokes authenticity and interaction. This content then strengthens the emotional, cognitive and behavioural connection with the brand. This means that when consumers see reviews, photos or videos from other users, their trust and willingness to actively communicate with the brand increases. Naeem and Ozuem (2020) show that user-generated content significantly influences consumer engagement with the brand by creating a social connection between content creators and recipients. According to the authors, this effect manifests itself through mechanisms such as identification, internalisation and group conformity.

Hodinková and Plachá (2021) emphasise that brand identification arises when corporate identity, i.e. culture, visual design and communication, corresponds to consumer perception, i.e. brand image. A stronger alignment between corporate identity and perceived image promotes a sense of belonging to the brand and increases customer engagement. Research by Jukić (2025) suggests that school culture is a fundamental element in shaping a school's brand, as it creates an internal environment that influences behaviour, values and the overall identity of the school. The author explains that building a school brand is not just a marketing process, but a

combination of managerial and pedagogical approaches, where school culture shapes the way communication takes place, the relationships between teachers and students, and the overall image of the school to the outside world. The study also shows that a strong and clearly defined school culture contributes to a greater emotional connection between parents, students and staff and the school. The author points out that school branding can only be created when school management understands school culture as a strategic tool and not just as a set of traditions or customs. Sinanis and Sanfelippo (2014) emphasise that school branding can be a good tool for school leaders. It helps not only to present the school's story and values, but also to activate the community and strengthen the school's identity.

Based on the authors' claims, we can say that brand engagement represents the involvement of people in interacting with the brand through thoughts, feelings, and specific activities. User-generated content and consistent brand identity increase trust and a sense of belonging. In an educational environment, school culture forms the basis of the brand, influences behaviour and values, and strengthens emotional connections with students, parents and staff. School branding is therefore not just marketing, but part of the school's strategic management and communication, which activates the community and strengthens the school's identity.

### 3. Methodology

The authors of the article conducted research in the form of an electronic questionnaire on a sample of 390 respondents. The target group of the research was secondary school graduates from various regions of Slovakia. Participants were selected by simple random sampling. Data collection took place between 6 October 2025 and 14 October.

Statistical methods, specifically sum and arithmetic mean, were used to calculate descriptive statistics. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to analyse the relationships between variables in hypothesis 1, given the combination of nominal and cardinal variables, while hypothesis 1 was also examined using Spearman's rank correlation coefficient. The coefficients were interpreted according to the following scale: values in the range 0–0.1 indicate no or negligible relationship, 0.1–0.3 weak relationship, 0.3–0.5 moderately strong relationship, 0.5–0.7 strong relationship, 0.7–0.9 a very strong relationship, and 0.9–1 a perfect relationship, indicating that the variables are identical.

In hypothesis 2, the nd the T-test for independent samples (Independent Samples t-test) were used for data analysis. Within the research for this hypothesis, we interpret the testing scale  $P < 0.05$  where the difference is statistically significant and  $P \geq 0.05$  where the difference is not statistically significant. The research takes into account statistical data to confirm hypothesis 2.

H1: Graduates who perceive the visual communication of their school as better also rate its overall promotion to the public more highly.

H2: Graduates who participated in creating school content (e.g., photos, articles, videos) show a higher level of identification with the school brand than those who did not participate.

### 4. Results and Discussion

Based on the results of Pearson's correlation coefficient ( $r = 0.49987$ ) and Spearman's rank correlation coefficient, it can be concluded that there is a positive, moderately strong relationship between the quality of a school's visual communication and the overall rating of the school's promotion. The result confirms the assumption formulated in hypothesis H1 that the perception of a school's visual communication as higher quality leads to a better overall assessment of its promotion to the public.

Table 1. Pearson's correlation coefficient and Spearman's rank correlation coefficient

H1: Graduates who perceive their school's visual communication as higher quality also rate its overall public promotion more highly.		
Independent variable: Quality of the school's visual communication *Ordinal scale (ranked)		
How would you rate your school's visual communication?	Value X	Number
Very good	5	49
	4	90
	3	163
	2	45
Very weak	1	37
Total		384
Dependent variable: Overall assessment of school promotion *Ordinal scale (ranked)		
How would you rate the level of publicity for your school among the general public?	Value Y	Number
Very good	5	55
Rather good	4	110
Average	3	153
Poor	2	55
I cannot judge	1	11
Total		384
Pearson's correlation coefficient	0.49987	
Spearman's rank correlation coefficient	0.49987	

Source: author (2025)

The research results confirm the existence of a statistically significant difference in the degree of identification with the school brand between graduates involved in content creation and those who were not involved. When testing hypothesis 2, the independent samples t-test defines a P-value of 0.0018, which demonstrates a statistically significant difference in the degree of identification between the two variables under investigation. A

comparison of the mean values showed that graduates who participated in content creation achieved a higher level of identification ( $M = 2.874$ ) compared to graduates who did not participate ( $M = 2.584$ ). These findings confirm the hypothesis that participation in the creation of school content communication contributes to stronger identification with the school brand.

Table 2. Independent Samples t-test

H2: Graduates who participated in creating school content (e.g., photos, articles, videos) show a higher level of identification with the school brand than those who did not participate.		
Variable (group): Participation in *nominal/dichotomous content creation scale (Yes/No)		
Have you ever participated in creating content for your school?	Yes	No
Yes / No	231	154
Variable (value): Degree of identification with the school brand	*Quantitative/Ordinal scale (e.g. 1–4)	
Did you perceive the school brand as something you could identify with (e.g., "I am proud to be from this school")?	Value	Number
Definitely yes	4	79
Probably yes	3	173
Rather no	2	96
definitely not	1	35
T-test for independent samples	P-value 0.0018	

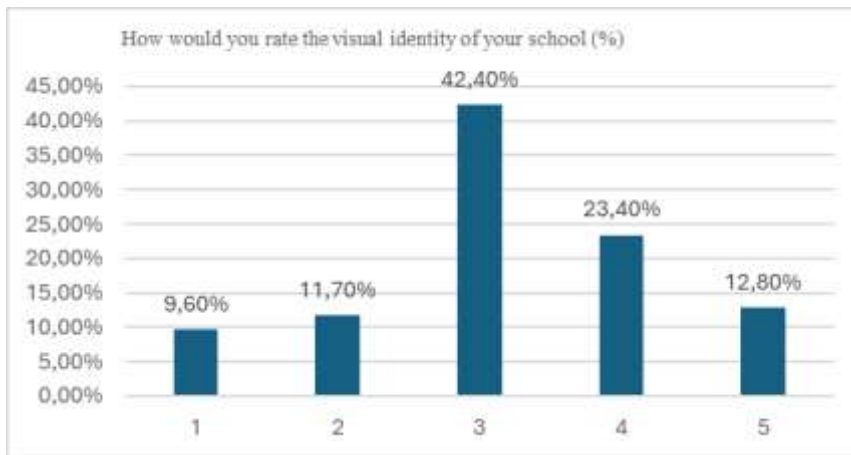
Source: author (2025)

Table 3. Statistical values

Statistical	Yes	No
Mean	2.874	2.584
Median	3	3
Standard deviation	0.873	0.913
Number of respondents (Count)	231	154
Minimum (Min)	0	0
Maximum (Max)	4	4

Source: author (2025)

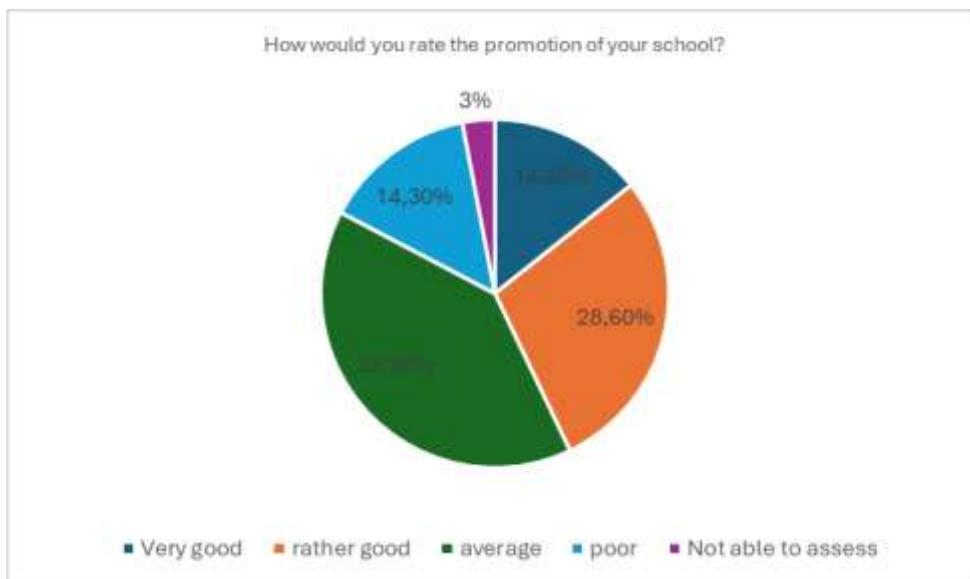
Hypothesis H1 was confirmed: Respondents (secondary school graduates) who rated their school's visual communication as high-quality and functional also rated the school's overall public promotion significantly better.



Graph 1 Visual identity of your school

Source: authors, 2025

From Graph 1 above, it can be concluded that more than 50% of respondents rated the level of visual identity positively and 44.5% rated it as average. In general, we assume that the visual identity of secondary schools is functional but not sufficiently consistent, creative and emotionally expressive to fulfil a branding function. For modern secondary schools, visual identity is not only an aesthetic element, but also a carrier of the values of students and graduates, which help them identify with the school and its culture and values (Balmer, 2012).

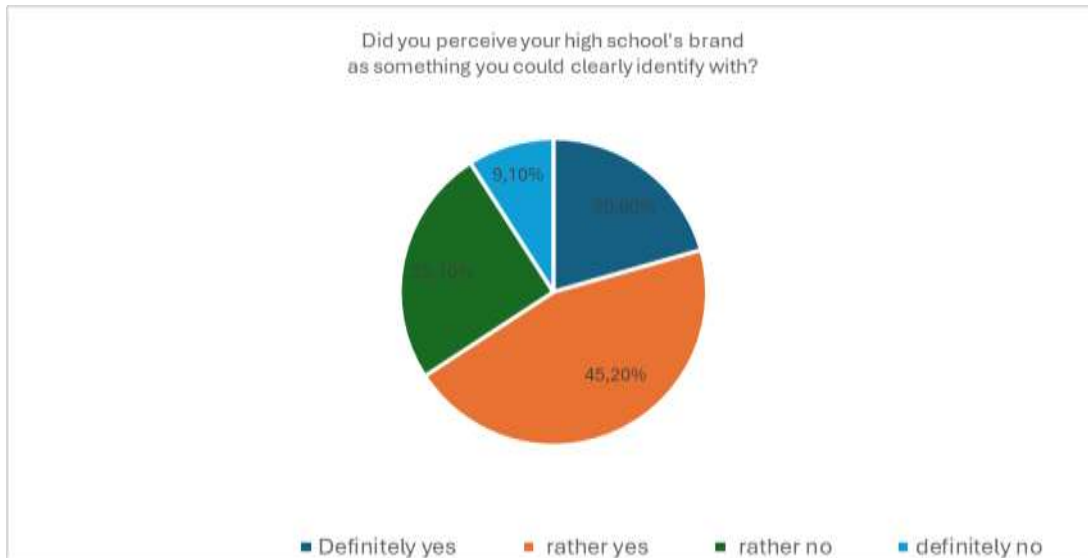


Graph 2 Promotion of your school

Source: authors, 2025

Schools do not attach sufficient importance to promotion. Although some graduates (approx. 42%) rate promotion positively, there is still a large group that has objections to promotion, with almost 40% considering it average and 14.3% poor. These results show that the visual identity of secondary schools alone cannot compensate for the weaknesses resulting from the insufficient use of promotional activities. Although schools use basic visual identity tools such as logos, colours, templates, etc., they are unable to use them effectively in promotional tools. They lack a strategy that would translate a functional visual identity into a functional promotional strategy.

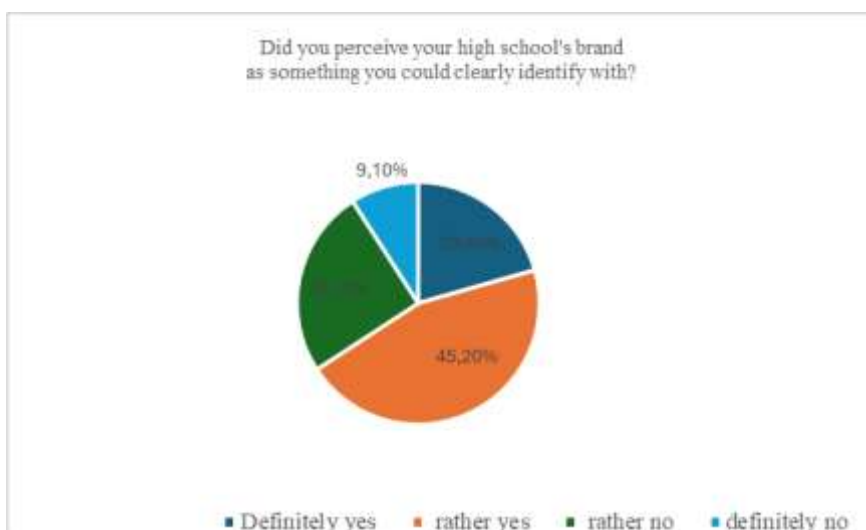
More than 60% of secondary school students participated in creating content for school promotion. There are several reasons for this. We consider one of the main reasons to be cost savings. Schools do not have budgets for promotion and do not employ promotion experts. Involving students is an economically advantageous solution for the school. In addition, students know the target group well because they are part of it. They know its style, language, attitudes and values.



Graph 3: Identification with school brand

Source: author, 2025

Based on the respondents' answers, we can conclude that (a) schools have already implemented participatory and community-oriented communication strategies to a certain extent, or (b) students naturally perceive school as an environment where content creation is part of social interaction and identity presentation. Both scenarios support the interpretation that educational institutions should continue to work on content creation with their students if they want to strengthen their brand.



Graph 4: Brand identification

Source: authors, 2025

It is very good news for schools that as many as 65.8% of respondents identify with the school brand, while 34.2% have a negative attitude, meaning that for almost one-third of respondents, various improvements need to be made in schools with a focus on better communication, promotion and strengthening trust in the brand.

## 5. Conclusion

For most respondents (secondary school students), the visual identity and visual communication of their school is an important factor that influences their overall assessment of the institution and their level of identification with the school brand. H1 was confirmed – graduates who rate the school's visual communication more positively also rate its promotion better ( ) and have a stronger relationship with the brand. It was also confirmed that active student participation in content creation contributes to strengthening their emotional relationship with the school (Hypothesis 2). Respondents involved in content creation, mainly on social networks and the school's website, achieved a higher level of identification.

One of the main barriers to our research is the subjectivity of visual identity perception. It was assessed by students (graduates) who have no practical experience with visual identity, and their perception may be influenced by several factors, such as satisfaction with the school, the school's image, and continuing ties to the school. The uneven representation of different types of secondary schools can be seen as another barrier to the research, but it did not significantly affect the final results.

One of the basic recommendations that schools should implement in their communication strategy is consistency in the area of visual identity and school promotion. They should work with a unified system of visual elements and communicate in a unified visual style, even though the target groups are differentiated. However, it is not enough to have a uniform, visual, modern identity; it is necessary to use it in all communication outputs directed at the internal and external environment. The results showed that involving students in creating their own content is a good strategy. They should therefore have their own media teams that could also communicate with communication experts. It is not enough to just publish quality content; everyone needs to know the basic goals of communication, the strategy and the possibilities for achieving them.

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