

# Chapter 12

## Eatertainment: Staging Food and Experiences for Brand Competitiveness in Restaurants

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### ABSTRACT

*The “eatertainment” phenomenon has become widespread as one of the latest trends for many restaurant brands. The main goal of the present work is to examine the relationship between the visual presentation of food and its influence on the multidimensional notion of brand experience. The research was exploratory and three focus group discussions were held. Findings revealed that food presentation enhances various dimensions of brand experience, although its impact varies: it significantly influences sensory brand experiences, mainly the visual and taste perceptions; it is less prominent in affective brand experiences, where other factors play a more significant role; it also shapes behavioral brand experiences, encouraging*

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3693-3579-6.ch012

*photography, online sharing, and culinary exploration; and its impact on intellectual brand experiences varies, with some seeing it inspiring and others merely aesthetic. However, plating is just one aspect of a holistic brand experience, necessitating a multifaceted strategy for contemporary diners.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Throughout the years, food has evolved from being a basic human necessity to serving various roles in contemporary society (Civitello, 2008). Currently, restaurants, cafés, and pubs are not only places for consumption. Rather, they have transitioned into multifunctional spaces that facilitate leisure, socialization, and even professional interactions, reflecting the cultural significance of eating out (Astuti & Hanan, 2016; Fieldhouse, 1996). Hence, these developments highlight the notable transformation in dining practices, reinforcing their fundamental role in many aspects of everyday life and society as a whole.

In this context, branding has emerged as a vital success factor due to the high level of competition (McCracken, 2022; Robitaille, 2023). As a result, it is not enough for restaurants to simply serve delicious meals. They must showcase their unique offers and create a distinct identity, and experiences, allowing them to form emotional relationships with their customers. This is where “eatertainment” takes place and space. As a result, a good brand strategy is essential not just for creating long-lasting impressions but also for standing out in a crowded market (Bistrohub, 2020; Kakadiya, 2023; McCracken, 2022; Robitaille, 2023). Today’s customers seek businesses that resonate with their emotions, engage their senses, and align with their lifestyles. Hence, they prioritize brands that emphasize meaningful and enjoyable experiences (Bapat & Thanigan, 2016; Hwang et al., 2021; Moreira et al., 2017; Schmitt et al., 2014). Consequently, restaurants should not only provide good quality and price but also offer distinctive experiences that encompass both practical and symbolic values for guests (Ong et al., 2018).

Moreover, delving deeper into the contemporary dining culture, the increased significance of food presentation is undeniable. Plating in restaurants does not only act as a decoration tool but it is also considered to be part of a holistic dining experience, which might enhance the overall enjoyment of a meal, as well as influence guests’ food choices and preferences (Cifci et al., 2021; Michel et al., 2014). Additionally, while the appreciation of an aesthetically presented meal is timeless, the rise of the digital age has increased its significance, reflecting the widespread trend of sharing food experiences online (Spence et al., 2016).

Although an increasing body of literature focuses on the art of plating, a significant gap remains in understanding its interplay with various brand constructs. Therefore, the present study aims to help bridge this gap by examining how plating within the context of brunch restaurants can influence the overall brand experience in its various dimensions. The selection of brunch for this study is due to its inherently photogenic appeal, which aligns with the trends of today's social media-centric culture (Future Food Strategy Group, 2018; Hartley, 2021). Describe the general perspective of the chapter. End by specifically stating the objectives of the chapter.

## **BACKGROUND**

Food reflects who we were, who we are, and who we might become. While genetics, environment, and lifestyle influence us, food plays a crucial role in our survival, quality of life, and physical and mental development at any age. It is a basic necessity, shaping not only daily routines but also social, political, economic, and aesthetic aspects across all societies. Thus, the meaning of food extends far beyond its role in meeting nutritional needs (Sobreira et al., 2018; Civitello, 2008).

Today, food is not just about survival; it's a public health issue with significant implications for human well-being. More than a universal need, food is also a habit, a cultural asset, and a reflection of our relationship with nature and the environment. The history of food mirrors human history, offering insights into society and culture. It highlights key transitions—from hunting and subsistence farming to industrialization—marked by imbalances of scarcity and abundance, environmental degradation, and globalized trade. Recently, movements like slow food, organic farming, and local food consumption have emerged alongside a rise in food intolerances and allergies, leading to diets that medicine now views as essential both individually and collectively.

It's not just about what we eat, but how we eat—the cultural practices, routines, and who we share meals with. Taste is shaped by society and culture, leading to conventions that dictate what can be eaten, when, and under what circumstances, such as specific foods, seasons, or diets. The eating customs of each culture show that eating is a dynamic act, influenced by time and place, marking civilization. Unlike other living beings that eat without social or cultural constraints, humans are defined by these conventions.

We live in a globalized, fragmented, and polarized world, driven by media, self-interest, and concerns about health and aesthetics, where food has become a spectacle and a shared media phenomenon. On one hand, movements focus on ecology, the SDGs, and slow food, while on the other, we witness war, famine, and poverty. This isn't a simple duality, but a spectrum of realities reflecting humanity's

disjointed presence on the planet. In today's "risk society" (Beck, 1986) and "liquid modernity" (Bauman, 1990), food embodies these paradoxes—overconsumption alongside media dependency. As Elias (1978) argued, food reflects civility and table manners, defining tribes, fostering belonging, and expressing ways of life. It carries a complex cultural symbolism, blending the personal pleasure of eating with the social act of sharing, both governed by community conventions and shared identities.

Sharing food is a fundamental way, humans address basic needs while distinguishing themselves from animals (Koponen & Mustonen, 2020). The concept of "commensality"—eating together at the same table — captures the essence of human sociability. Public eating, however, has evolved into a way to express both individual and collective identity (Crowther, 2018). Through shared consumption, food symbolizes the "we" of social groups and occasionally all of humankind. Thus, food becomes a powerful symbol of the collective self, while also representing individuals, as it embodies personal identity and serves as a metonym for the self (Pilcher, 2012).

"Food porn" thrives on social media, where meals are often photographed before being eaten, almost replacing the traditional act of giving thanks. It has become a social marker, akin to what people buy, wear, drive, or the places they visit. Consumption is now a key part of identity formation (Miles, 1996), and social media provides the ideal platform for this. Food is also deeply tied to ethnic and national identity (Civitello, 2011), turning meals into performances of collective interaction, amplified by social networks. Food symbolism plays a significant role in many religions, with dietary restrictions reflecting spiritual beliefs (Fieldhouse, 1996). For example, Jewish dietary laws (*kashrut*) define what foods are permissible for consumption.

Food is consumed not only for its nutritional value but also for what it represents in its social and cultural context, becoming a marker of status, social position, and inclusion or exclusion, as Bourdieu (1979) suggests. Ritualized meals, like Christian Christmas dinners, Jewish Passover feasts, or the Muslim observance of Ramadan, embody collective performances that reinforce social order and strengthen group solidarity, as Durkheim theorizes. Cultural cuisines are maintained through specific food practices, including common ingredients, distinctive flavors, and preparation methods, which are tied to both daily and festive traditions. Shared food habits foster a sense of belonging and cultural identity, making them difficult to abandon (Fieldhouse, 1996), underscoring the importance of studying this topic to better understand its societal impact.

Food consumption, once primarily a household activity, has shifted outside the home and evolved into a leisure pursuit (Astuti & Hanan, 2016). Restaurants have become central to social life, with dining out being a popular activity. Sharing meals and drinks in comfortable settings has become one of life's pleasures, and more meals

are now consumed away from home than ever before (Walker, 2017). Restaurants, coffee shops, and pubs are not only places to eat but also spaces for socializing, working, relaxing, and conversation (Astuti & Hanan, 2016; Fieldhouse, 1996).

The concept of restaurants has evolved over centuries, emerging in various forms across different regions without a single point of origin (Crowther, 2018; Rawson & Shore, 2019; Sloan & Leith, 2003). Today, restaurants are integral to modern life, but their development from early taverns, cookshops, and inns took a millennium (Akdeniz, 2019). A restaurant is now a place where meals are served at various times, with customers choosing from a diverse menu (Rawson & Shore, 2019; Sloan & Leith, 2003). The term originated from a French soup vendor in the 1700s, with 'restaurant' deriving from 'restorative,' as these establishments initially offered medicinal soups (Cracknell & Nobis, 1989; Sloan & Leith, 2003). The term's evolution to its current meaning reflects the modernization of Western culture, a topic of interest for cultural theorists and historians (Sloan & Leith, 2003).

Restaurants existed in various regions long before the French Revolution, driven by economic and social factors (Akdeniz, 2019; Kiefer, 2002). The first restaurants actually originated in 12th-century China, amid administrative changes and urban growth (Akdeniz, 2019; Kiefer, 2002; Rawson & Shore, 2019).

The modern restaurant is often linked to revolutionary Paris, with A. Boulanger, a soup vendor, considered the first restaurateur, opening in 1765 (Walker, 2021). By the late 1780s, grand restaurants in Paris set the classic model. By the 1820s, restaurants catered to travelers and locals alike, offering a social dining experience (Crowther, 2018). Restaurants became hubs of urban sociability, serving all social classes and becoming more diverse as dining out grew popular among all socio-economic groups, including women (Rawson & Shore, 2019). They symbolize the democratization of luxury and the spread of fashion, playing a role in the civilizing process (Sloan & Leith, 2003).

By reviewing several reports on current and future market trends (Restaurant Industry 2030 by the National Restaurant Association, 2019; 2023 Dining Trends Report by TouchBistro, 2023; Trends and Tactics: How to Navigate the Changing Landscape of the European Restaurant Industry by Merckaert, 2023b), four trends play critical roles in the restaurant industry known today: technology, health-consciousness, sustainability, and unique experiences.

The digital revolution of the food and beverage industry has been a long time in the making, with the pandemic accelerating the process (Merckaert, 2023a). And although the pandemic could have increased takeaway and delivery, it is evident that customers still enjoy the experience of dining in. According to a study conducted by TouchBistro (2023), ordering food home has never been easier; nevertheless, most diners agree that it cannot replace the full experience of going out to restaurants.

Moreover, in recent years, there has been a noticeable increase in customers' interest in health and wellness (Georgiev, n.d.; Owner, n.d.). The demand for unprocessed whole foods is increasing as the population develops more chronic illnesses and individuals educate themselves on the advantages of nutritious eating (Owner, n.d.). Furthermore, younger generations are more willing to spend extra for healthy meals that include 'buzzwords' like all-natural, organic, and GMO-free. Vegan food is also becoming a popular trend and many restaurants are catching up with it (Georgiev, n.d.). It is also likely that more customers will have dietary restrictions such as vegetarian, gluten-free, lactose-free or paleo among many others and operators will need to provide more alternatives to accommodate special diets (National Restaurant Organization, 2019; Wasserstrom, 2019). Nonetheless, it is also important to note that offering healthier meal alternatives may attract a more varied clientele and attract guests who may otherwise avoid visiting (Owner, n.d.).

However, trends in the restaurant sector can be about more than just cuisine or service. "Eatertainment", originally started in places like Disney, became widespread as one of the latest trends for many restaurant brands. To create a memorable event, an experience occurs to engage individual customers, when a company intentionally uses services as the stage, and goods as props. Experiences are memorable, as services are intangible and goods are tangible. Experiences are the heart of the entertainment business. Walt Disney has creatively exploited this concept. But today the concept is taking root in businesses far removed from amusement parks. New technologies encourage whole new types of experiences, such as multi-player or interactive games, Internet chat rooms, simulators and virtual reality. In the food industry theme restaurants such as the Hard Rock Café or Planet Hollywood, promise that concept of experience plus entertainment, also known as "eatertainment."

The environment has become one of the most recent concerns causing customer changes in the food and beverage market (Euler, 2022; Georgiev, n.d.; Voicu, 2023a). Environmentally friendly activities have grown in the recent decade and are expected to grow even faster in the upcoming years (National Restaurant Organization, 2019). In order to be more sustainable, restaurants need to consider recycling initiatives, sustainably sourced products, energy-efficient equipment and even eco-friendly designs. Since food deliveries are also a crucial part of today's industry, restaurants must consider environmentally friendly packaging (Burton-Hughes, 2020). In fact, 43% of diners would be willing to pay more to fund restaurants' sustainability measures, and some customers indicated they would not order if sustainable packaging alternatives are not available (Merckaert, 2023a).

Nevertheless, the social aspect of sustainability should also be mentioned. It concerns initiatives like aiding the local community, establishing appropriate relationships with community members, guests, employees, or suppliers, and complying to ethical standards (Božić & Milošević, 2021). 77% of consumers

worldwide prefer purchasing goods from socially responsible businesses, and even in the restaurant industry, they are willing to spend 5-10% more due to the brand's devotion to the community. As a result, restaurants should become more socially responsible, benefiting both their surroundings and reputation. This could include sourcing products locally and seasonally to support local farmers and communities; or even supporting social causes through donations for charities or partnerships with organizations which tackle issues such as food insecurity or hunger (Khachatryan, 2023). In addition, nowadays customers also expect restaurants to address issues of equality and diversity, as well as their commitment to create a society that is more inclusive and fair (McCain Foods, 2021).

## **Brunch Restaurants and Plating**

The term 'brunch' combines 'breakfast' and 'lunch' (Martins, 2018), reflecting its mix of the two meals. It typically includes a variety of dishes suitable for both breakfast and lunch (Peters-Desteract, 2018; Ternikar, 2014). By the 1920s, brunch had become a sign of class, and by the 1950s, it symbolized comfort and convenience (Ternikar, 2014).

In recent decades, brunch has evolved into a meal of comfort and casual entertaining, often associated with luxurious dining (Ellison, 2022; Ternikar, 2014). Today, it represents gastronomic luxury and comfort food (Ternikar, 2014). Millennials, who value experiences over material possessions, have driven the brunch revolution, making it popular among them and Gen Z (Future Food Strategy Group, 2018; Mintel, 2022). The creative nature of brunch often makes it irresistible to photograph before eating (Future Food Strategy Group, 2018; Hartley, 2021).

Plating refers to "both the preparation and presentation of food on a plate", with the two primary goals of visual and sensual attraction (Meulen, 2017, p. 236). This presentation involves the combination of various visual attributes of the plateware to create a visually appealing and cohesive presentation (Spence et al., 2014). Relatively little research has been done on the cultural history of plates and plating, compared to the studies of eating. Nevertheless, "we eat first with our eyes." (Apicius in Spence et al., 2016, p. 53; Delwiche, 2012) is a well-known expression, allegedly coined by the Roman gourmand Apicius in the first century AD, has recently been supported by numerous scientific studies demonstrating its relevance in today's world (Gambetti & Han, 2022; Michel et al., 2014; Spence et al., 2016). Visual compositions of plates are becoming increasingly important since findings suggest that presenting food in an aesthetically pleasing way can improve the overall enjoyment of the meal (Cifci et al., 2021; Michel et al., 2014). Eatertainment is aligned with this trend, therefore, plating should be viewed as a component of a complex dining experience, which



today plays a critical role in the creative processes in the kitchen and people's food preferences (Cifci et al., 2021).

The growing significance of this trend can be attributed to the rapid increase in digital interfaces and audiovisual media, justifying the massive spread of "food porn." With the proliferation of smartphones, tablets, and other electronic devices, individuals now have constant access to digital screens (Gambetti & Han, 2022; Spence et al., 2016). These technologies have not only increased exposure to digital images of food but also heightened the desire to share meal images on social media (Spence et al., 2016). A large portion of Instagram images are food-related, with approximately 85% of photos featuring food content and 208 million posts with the hashtag 'food' (Gambetti & Han, 2022; Spence et al., 2022).

The phrase 'camera eats first' illustrates how sharing meal pictures on social media has become a fundamental part of dining experiences (Gambetti & Han, 2022; Wachyuni & Yusuf, 2021; Yong et al., 2020). Consequently, people often choose restaurants based on food images shared by other customers. To increase engagement, restaurants also implement image-driven social media strategies, sharing pictures of their dishes on social media and websites (Gambetti & Han, 2022).

Color, shape, and balance are significant characteristics of food that customers value, aiming for a harmonious and appealing composition that is both aesthetically pleasing and nutritionally satisfying (Cifci et al., 2021). The character of the chef is also important, as the design of a chef's plate can reflect their identity and personality (Edwards, 2023). Chefs today have the aura of "rock stars," globally known and celebrated by the media through shows, YouTube videos, and series. Names like Gordon Ramsay, Jamie Oliver, and Anthony Bourdain have become global phenomena, with Michelin Stars akin to the "Oscars" in this field, becoming brands that sell experiences.

## **The Importance of Branding in the Restaurant Industry**

Branding is a vital component of the restaurant industry (McCracken, 2022; Robitaille, 2023). According to Dabeva (2012), the ability to differentiate, emphasize, and highlight the distinctive attributes of products and services is critical in the contemporary landscape. Therefore, operating a restaurant requires more than just serving delicious meals (McCracken, 2022). Without a unique identity, restaurants cannot connect with customers on an emotional level; thus, besides offering excellent food and service, a carefully planned brand strategy becomes critical in creating lasting impressions among customers and distinguishing oneself from competitors in the market (Bistrohub, 2020; Kakadiya, 2023; McCracken, 2022; Robitaille, 2023). As



a result, it is widely understood that establishing and maintaining powerful brands is critical for succeeding in the hospitality sector (Gardini, 2014; Kwun, 2012).

Nonetheless, in addition to ensuring long-term success for businesses, restaurant owners may notice a variety of beneficial outcomes that can result from proper branding and brand management (Dabeva, 2012). Restaurant branding aids in developing a unique identity and personality for businesses, to tell their stories, how it wants to be perceived by customers, allowing the business to maintain a consistent and differentiated image (Dobos, 2022). Serving as an informative tool and an indicator of the restaurant's quality and image since it allows effective communication about products and services.

Therefore, customers can learn about products and services, have consistent quality standards, and receive clear and trustworthy information about the brand (Genc, 2010). Restaurants may also build a strong emotional connection with customers, leading to frequent visits and therefore increased customer loyalty, especially when paired with excellent cuisine and a memorable dining experience (Dobos, 2022). By building trust and loyalty among diners, restaurants can also profit from better customer recalls and positive word-of-mouth (Cuboh, 2022; Robitaille, 2023). Branding is also closely connected to credibility. Given the sensitivity surrounding food, people are unlikely to dine in a restaurant that does not appear to be trustworthy (Dobos, 2022). Restaurants may successfully decrease perceived risks, such as financial, social, and safety concerns, by building a recognizable brand with which customers are familiar and have positive associations (Dabeva, 2012). Finally, developing a solid brand opens up greater potential for brand extension (Kwun, 2012). Hence, as a result of a successful brand strategy, restaurants may improve revenue performance by introducing new items or services with lower costs (Dabeva, 2012).

When examining the restaurant industry, it's essential to recognize that brands and brand management influence customers through various channels. Dining at a restaurant is a sensory experience, so the brand must consider multiple elements that affect guests throughout their journey, from booking a table to leaving the restaurant. A successful brand strategy encompasses every visible aspect of the restaurant and every component customers interact with, including staff, menus, advertisements, and food presentation (McCracken, 2022). Each element contributes to the brand's development, and the goal is to combine them in the most effective way. Instead of viewing elements as independent entities, restaurant owners should synchronize them to align with the overall business concept (Dabeva, 2012).

Over the years, economic and social landscapes have transformed significantly. At the start of the millennium, experiences became the foundation of a new type of economy and marketing approach (Schmitt et al., 2014). Pine and Gilmore (1998) described this phenomenon as the 'experience economy,' where businesses shift from offering products and services to offering experiences (Cleff et al., 2014). The

economic value of society has evolved through various phases: from a commodity-based phase before the Industrial Revolution, to a manufacturing phase during the revolution, and then to the service-focused economy of the 20th century (Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Schmitt et al., 2014). With the advent of the ‘experience economy,’ the most valuable economic offerings have become enjoyable and informative experiences (Schmitt et al., 2014).

Contemporary customers are not only considered rational but also emotional, who do not base their choices of products and services solely on functionality and benefits (Khan & Fatma, 2017; Moreira et al., 2017). They seek products and marketing initiatives that engage their senses, connect with their emotions, and spark intellectual interest while also matching their lifestyle and, most importantly, delivering experiences (Moreira et al., 2017; Schmitt et al., 2014). They desire more than functionality; they seek enjoyable experiences with their chosen brands (Bapat & Thanigan, 2016; Hwang et al., 2021).

The importance of brand experience can be observed in marketing and brand management literature (Khan & Fatma, 2017). Hence, the need to create distinctive and memorable brand experiences has been highlighted over the last ten years in order to build better connections between brands and customers and improve the overall performance of businesses. The concept of experience has been extensively studied across various contexts by numerous researchers, contributing to the development of key ideas and associations (Pina & Dias, 2021). Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) were pioneers in introducing the concept of ‘experience’ in marketing, suggesting that consumption is not purely rational but also involves an experiential component, encompassing “fantasies, feelings, and fun” (Pina & Dias, 2021). Pine and Gilmore (1998) further advanced the field by introducing the ‘experience economy,’ highlighting the personal nature of experiences.

Building on these foundations, Schmitt (1999a, 1999b) explored experience from a multidimensional perspective, enriching the marketing literature with various constructs of ‘experience.’ Research has examined experience in multiple contexts and stages of the consumer life cycle (Nysveen et al., 2012), leading to constructs such as consumption experience, service experience, shopping experience, product experience, customer experience, and brand experience. Consequently, the overall brand experience comprises several experiential notions, including consumption, service, shopping, and product experiences (Brakus et al., 2009).

Brakus et al. (2009, p. 53) were the first to provide a comprehensive definition of brand experience, describing it “as subjective, internal consumer responses (sensations, feelings, and cognitions) and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand’s design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments”. Ha and Perks (2005) took a cognitive approach to brand experiences, and the term could be described as how well-informed and familiar a consumer is

with a specific brand or brand category, leading to better memorability and deeper significance for individuals, potentially fostering greater trust in the brand and enhancing their ability to classify brands by their attributes (Ha & Perks, 2005). Moreover, brand experience is defined as consumers' perceptions of the brand at every interaction with it, from advertising impressions to human encounters. Yet, direct personal connections are the most important aspect of creating an outstanding brand experience (Alloza, 2008).

The elements representing a brand's identity and design, which can act as stimuli, can include the name, slogan, logo, signage, packaging, mascot, the environment of the physical store, or any other communication forms like advertisements, websites, brochures, or even events. Nonetheless, the stimuli could also be in the form of the brand's visual identity, involving shapes, colors, typefaces, or any other design elements (Brakus et al., 2009). Moreover, brand experiences can vary in their level of intensity and strength, as well as in their valence, origin and duration. It was Brakus et al. (2009, p. 53) who provided a more detailed examination of this phenomenon in their study and stated that "in particular, brand experience differs from evaluative, affective, and associative constructs, such as brand attitudes, brand involvement, brand attachment, customer delight, and brand personality." They claimed that as opposed to brand attitudes, which are concerning more general impressions, such as liking or disliking brands, experiences are specific reactions to the interactions with a brand. Also, while brand involvement and attachment necessitate a personal interest in or connection to the brand, brand experiences could occur without these. In contrast to customer delight, which occurs after product use, brand experiences can happen at any interaction, whether expected or unexpected. Finally, unlike brand personality, which attributes human traits to businesses, brand experiences are about genuine reactions to brand-related stimuli (Brakus et al., 2009). Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) were the first to present the notion of experience within this field, highlighting the experimental view of consumption by claiming that it could also involve "various playful leisure activities, sensory pleasures, daydreams, esthetic enjoyment and emotional responses" (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982, p. 132). Hence, this could already hint at the dimensions of activities, sensations, and emotions (Nysveen et al., 2012). Pine and Gilmore (1999) proposed the four 'e' dimensions of experiences: 'entertainment', 'educational', 'escapist', and 'esthetic' (aesthetic). The four zones also lie along the axes of active versus passive (describes the participation), and immersion versus absorption (describes the connection) (Clegg et al., 2014; Pine & Gilmore 1998).

Schmitt (1999a, 1999b) identified five distinct dimensions of experiences, including 'sense' (sensory), 'think' (cognitive), 'feel' (affective), 'act' (physical) and 'relate' (social). The element of 'sense' uses the five senses to create sensory experiences; the 'think' element refers to the engagement of the mind in order to

deliver intellectual, solution-oriented experiences that inspire customers' creativity; when it comes to appealing to customers' feelings and emotions, the element of 'feel' prevalent; the element of 'act' represents physical experiences, lifestyles, and behaviors; and finally, the 'relate' element stands for social experiences that help a person connect to their ideal selves, other individuals, or cultures (Bapat & Thanigan, 2016; Beig & Nika, 2019; Schmitt, 1999b).

It was Brakus et al. (2009) who first empirically identified the brand experience dimensions. It is worth noting that the five types of experiences identified by Schmitt (1999) served as the foundation for their study on brand experiences. Nonetheless, as opposed to Schmitt (1999), Brakus et al. (2009) created a customer-focused approach that saw experiences as unique, internal, and behavioral responses of customers rather than as tactical aspects of experiential marketing. They proposed four underlying brand experience dimensions, which include 'sensory', 'affective', 'behavioral', and 'intellectual' experiences with the help of cognitive science, philosophical studies, as well as experience marketing and management (Brakus et al., 2009; Hwang et al., 2021).

'Sensory experiences' are primarily focusing on customers' visual, auditory, smell, taste, and touch perceptions. Hence, it includes the activation of senses via brand exposure (Huaman-Ramirez & Merunka, 2019), visual elements are seen as key in sensory experiences, since images are easily remembered by customers. Visual brand experiences give consumers an aesthetic feel of the brand as well as its surroundings. However, the importance of tasting, smelling, hearing, and touching varies by the product and services of businesses. Moreover, taste and touch are direct experiences, while smell and sound can be indirectly felt through a brand's atmosphere (Huaman-Ramirez & Merunka, 2019).

'Affective experiences' include all the feelings, emotions and moods sparked by interacting with businesses. In simple terms, it captures the emotional bond between the consumer and the brand (Hwang et al., 2021). This subdimension of experiences is imprinted in the brains of customers and causes either positive (such as love for the brand or enthusiasm for the brand) or negative (such as hatred for the brand or disgust) emotions (Mostafa & Kasamani, 2020).

Moreover, 'behavioral experiences', can encourage certain physical acts, behaviors, and lifestyles after interacting with a brand (Pina & Dias, 2021). Hence, it also entails doing tasks in a more efficient manner and even creating improvements to one's lifestyle (Hwang et al., 2021). In fact, customers are enthusiastic to participate in physical activities in order to create memorable experiences with a brand. Furthermore, the body may be used as a source of well-being, as a representation of emotions, and as a form of symbolic representation (Huaman-Ramirez & Merunka, 2019). It is also worth highlighting that behavioral experiences leave a long-lasting

impression on customers and are seen as a crucial component of successful marketing practices (Mostafa & Kasamani, 2020).

Finally, 'intellectual experiences' involve creative and analytical thinking induced by encounters with a brand. It is believed that customers can clearly better recall brands with intellectual experiences and remember memories associated with them. Thus, intellectual experiences should aim to convince and create positive and satisfying memories for customers, as intellectual experience could form people's opinions about a brand (Mostafa & Kasamani, 2020).

Brakus et al. (2009) argued that brand experiences positively influence brand satisfaction, brand loyalty, as well as brand personality. Since positive brand experiences offer value for customers, it could lead to increased satisfaction among customers. Moreover, a favorable experience is one that customers see as different and memorable, one they would want to relive and recommend to others (Moreira et al., 2017). Brand experience influences not just previous satisfaction assessments, but also upcoming customer loyalty (Mostafa & Kasamani, 2020). Therefore, brand experience helps businesses stand out, win customer loyalty, and establish long-term connections with customers (Mostafa & Kasamani, 2020; Ong et al., 2018). Furthermore, brand experience directly increases brand attachment since favorable brand interactions can deepen customers' emotional bonds.

Thus, as brand experience becomes increasingly important in today's world, marketers study its effects and how they relate to other brand elements, which could be beneficial to improve marketing strategies (Bapat & Thanigan, 2016). It is not at all unexpected that today's top global corporations prioritize providing favorable experiences as one of their strategic objectives (Shamim & Butt, 2013). Therefore, to remain relevant in contemporary markets, businesses must focus on every facet of brand experience, as it not only provides increased brand value, but also drives higher sales; and ensures frequent engagement and marketplace dominance. Customers seek tangible benefits and unique experiences when it comes to restaurants. Hence, competition has shifted from only offering good quality and prices to providing distinctive dining experiences (Ong et al., 2018). Within the restaurant sector, customer experience studies often overlook the potential for experiences deriving from sensations, emotions, behaviors, and intellect in the context of branding. However, since distinctive brand experiences will provide a long-lasting competitive advantage in the restaurant sector, it is crucial to consider experiences based on the brand rather than just from the customer's viewpoint (Ong et al., 2018).

Brand experiences for products are generally simpler than those for services, making them easier to manage. Mosley (2007) explains this by highlighting the complexity in service-oriented businesses, which can be viewed from two perspectives: managing the variety of services provided (operational complexity) and handling customer interactions (interpersonal complexity). The former deals with

the range and steps of services, while the latter focuses on relationship quality and understanding client needs.

Services differ from products in terms of intangibility (less or no physical presence), inseparability (simultaneous provision and consumption), heterogeneity (variation in service performance), and perishability (cannot be stored for future use) (Mandil, 2016; Nysveen et al., 2012). However, Mandil (2016) notes that services can bridge the gap between products and experiences. As services become more experiential, there is increased interaction with employees, greater personal touch, and more customization options (Mandil, 2016). This aligns with Pine and Gilmore's (1998) observation of a shift from product orientation to services, and eventually to experiences.

Due to their complex nature, services involve multi-level customer interactions, central to the concept of experience. These characteristics highlight the need to focus more on service-based brand experiences, which may be more relevant for understanding brand experiences than product-based ones (Mandil, 2016).

In the restaurant context, diners of today value not only practical, but also symbolic aspects, making the dining experience essential for return visits (Ong et al., 2018). Customers choose restaurants not just to meet their immediate needs, but also to have a delightful brand experience, which could actually be enhanced by several brand clues: "the quality of food, order-handling system, ambience, and behavior and appearance of the staff" (Khan & Fatma, 2017, p. 448-449). As a consequence, a restaurant brand is more likely to provide customers with a favorable brand experience if it has a high-quality cuisine, an effective order-handling system, a relaxing atmosphere, and well-trained employees who exhibit appropriate behavior and appearance. Besides these brand clues, they revealed that diners are more inclined to visit a restaurant for a new brand experience if they find the marketing messages appealing. Hence, marketers should create campaigns that are both meaningful and emotionally engaging. Moreover, customers now rely more on websites for gathering information, so it is important to update these sites as well. Finally, the significance of organizing thematic events (e.g., charity fundraisers) that might elicit pleasant emotions was noted as a way, businesses can strengthen the connection between the brand and customers (Khan & Fatma, 2017).

This study highlights that memorable brand experiences not only boost marketing success but also build trust, customer satisfaction, loyalty, positive brand attitudes, word-of-mouth, and increased brand credibility (Khan & Fatma, 2017). In conclusion, effective branding and brand management are essential in the competitive restaurant industry. Although still emerging, the concept of brand experience has gained significant importance due to changing customer attitudes and preferences. As society enters the 'experience economy,' brands focus more on creating memo-



rable experiences rather than just offering products and services, emphasizing the importance of emotional connections with customers.

Brand experiences are particularly crucial for restaurants due to their multidimensional nature. A restaurant's brand strategy must encompass all visible aspects that customers interact with, including plating, which can be considered a brand-related stimulus. This makes it relevant to study whether aesthetic plating can enhance the overall brand experience of diners. Therefore, given the pivotal role of brand experiences in the restaurant sector, this research explores whether aesthetic plating in restaurants can significantly enhance diners' perceived brand experience.

Adopting a primary research question: How does plating in restaurants influence the overall brand experience of diners? This work breaks this question into four sub questions, by following Brakus et al. (2009) concept of brand experience, addressing the four dimensions of sensory, affective, behavioral, and intellectual experience. Hence the following four research subquestions:

- RQ1A: How does food presentation in restaurants influence the sensory brand experience of diners?
- RQ1B: How does food presentation in restaurants influence the affective brand experience of diners?
- RQ1C: How does food presentation in restaurants influence the behavioral brand experience of diners?
- RQ1D: How does food presentation in restaurants influence the intellectual brand experience of diners?

## **METHODOLOGY**

This exploratory research adopts a social constructivist and interpretivist philosophical worldview, utilizing a qualitative research approach (Creswell, 2017; Kelliher, 2005). It employs a focus group strategy (Babbie, 2011; Creswell, 2017; Hair et al., 2021; Mainardes et al., 2010) to deeply explore the relationship between food plating and diners' perceived brand experience. According to Powell and Single (1996, p. 499), a focus group is "a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of the research." This approach uses guided, interactive conversations to provide detailed insights into complex experiences and the reasons behind beliefs, behaviors, perceptions, and attitudes (Powell & Single, 1996).

Focus groups allow researchers to understand how and why individuals think about a specific topic, offering insights into their viewpoints and priorities. By fostering direct engagement, this strategy brings researchers closer to the topic,



making it easier to understand participants' perspectives (Lane et al., 2001). This method is known for collecting real-life information in social settings, making it more reflective of genuine thoughts and behaviors. Its flexibility allows adaptation to various scenarios and situations. Additionally, this method is effective and trustworthy, contributing to the study's validity. It can provide quick results and is considered cost-effective compared to other methods. Group dynamics often reveal aspects of the issue that might not emerge in one-on-one interviews (Babbie, 2011). Given the goal of this research to address the perceived influence of food plating on diners' brand experience, and considering the social dynamics and relevance of plating, especially on social media, focus groups were deemed an appropriate data collection strategy.

### **Sampling, Participants Selection and Data Collection Procedures**

Focus group participants often come from purposive sampling, where individuals are selected for their relevance to the research rather than their representativeness (Hair et al., 2021; Lane et al., 2001). This method allows for the collection of rich data that significantly reflect the characteristics of the population from which the sample is drawn (Lane et al., 2001). Qualitative exploratory research prioritizes thick descriptions, process identification and mapping, and exploring individual nuances and perceptions about a topic over representativeness. To mitigate the risk of unrepresentative insights from a single small group, multiple focus groups were conducted. Three focus groups were held in Hungary, each consisting of five participants, including both male and female members. Despite their diverse educational and professional backgrounds, all participants were members of Generation Z and from Hungary. Generation Z is particularly important for the hospitality sector due to their high customer lifetime value potential (Babbie, 2011).

Members of Generation Z highly value authentic brand experiences. In fact, they are typically more inclined toward creating memories and engaging in experiences rather than acquiring material possessions (Inphantry, 2017). This generation seeks pleasure in experiences that are not limited to large-scale concerts or travels; they seek enjoyment in experiences that are part of everyday life as well (We Are Collider, 2022). More than half of Generation Z and Millennials have increased their frequency of eating breakfast at foodservice establishments, making brunch an ideal opportunity to meet their demands and help foodservice firms build a loyal client base (Future Food Strategy Group, 2018; Mintel, 2022). Additionally, Generation Z highly values unique, relatable, and photogenic food experiences. They seek out new and appealing foods that not only satisfy their taste but are also suitable for

sharing on social media, reflecting their enthusiasm for capturing and sharing these experiences (Campisi, 2022; McLymont, 2022).

A specific restaurant was intentionally chosen as the study's center to examine how plating might influence brand experiences. Participants were invited for brunch at this restaurant before the focus group discussions. This provided them with a practical, real-world experience, ensuring richer and more in-depth conversations during the focus group meetings. Given the geographical focus of the research, the study was conducted in Budapest, Hungary. A well-known brunch restaurant in the city was chosen as the ideal venue, representing contemporary brunch trends in Budapest and providing an appropriate setting to examine the relationship between food plating and brand experiences. Although the restaurant opened in early 2023, it quickly gained popularity in the lively city environment, attracting neighborhood employees, tourists, and local customers from various age groups. The restaurant offers all-day breakfast, allowing customers to enjoy breakfast options throughout the day, which is rare among other brunch spots in Budapest.

## **Participants Characteristics**

Group 1 of participants was composed by 5 individuals with ages from 23 to 25 years, being 3 females and 2 males. Group 2 had also 5 participants from 23 to 24 years old, and 3 females and 1 male. On the other hand, Group 3 had also 5 individuals with the age distribution as Group 1 and 4 females and 1 male. To ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the participants, their identities have been anonymized. Participants were identified by a unique code, comprising the number of the focus group they participated in (either 1, 2, or 3), followed by a specific number assigned to them within that group.

In this study, these young people are all Hungarians from Generation Z, and in the constitution of the three groups, gender issues were ignored in favor of the diversity of backgrounds and occupation that these young people have. Therefore, in terms of results, gender issues did not prove to be relevant. Yet, it is believed that the results could be richer if the background of these young people were different, which is why three groups were created, with no people having the same occupation or background.

## **Data Collection Instrument: Focus Group Script**

The script for the focus group sessions, consisted of five different sections: 1) Introduction to the study; 2) Warm-up questions; 3) General questions about the appreciation of aesthetic food plating; 4) Questions about the overall dining experi-

ence in the chosen restaurant; 5) Questions about the brand experience in the chosen restaurant (sensory, affective, behavioral, intellectual).

The introduction provided an overview of the research issue, ensuring participants understood the main topic and objective. Section 2 used warm-up questions as icebreakers, allowing participants to discuss their dining habits. In Section 3, participants were asked about their appreciation of aesthetic food plating, inspired by the Centrality of Visual Product Aesthetics (CVPA) scale (Bloch et al., 2003). Questions were adjusted to food presentation, asking how much they value appealing food, if it enhances their eating experience, and if it influences their choice of meals or locations. They also considered if appealing food presentation would encourage them to recommend or return to the restaurant. Section 4 addressed participants' experiences at the chosen restaurant. They shared their overall thoughts on their recent visit, focusing on the visual appeal of their meals and whether any elements of the presentation stood out. Participants discussed if meal presentation was a defining characteristic of the restaurant. Section 5, inspired by Brakus et al.'s (2009), brand experience framework, explored the four dimensions of guests' experiences. The sensory dimension examined how the dining experience appealed to their senses and if the food presentation enhanced sensory engagement. The affective dimension looked at the emotional connection with the restaurant's brand, discussing feelings and emotions during dining and how food presentation influenced these ties. The behavioral dimension focused on diners' actions, such as taking photos or writing reviews. It meant to assess how the restaurant's food presentation might have influenced guests' activities or engagements. To assess the intellectual dimension of the dining experience, participants were asked if their time at the restaurant sparked their curiosity or offered fresh perspectives on dining. This also aimed to understand if the restaurant's plating style played a role in stimulating such intellectual reflections.

## **Data Analysis Procedures**

After the focus group discussions, which were audio recorded, the sessions were later transcribed to prepare for data analysis. The focus groups were conducted in Hungarian. Thus, to make the data universally accessible the transcriptions were translated into English.

For data analysis, we used thematic analysis to interpret focus group discussions. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis identifies, analyzes, and reports patterns (themes) within data. This technique focuses on identifying common themes from group dynamics and participant interaction, including personal attitudes, ideas, beliefs, and societal conventions (Massey, 2011). Instead of numerical metrics, thematic analysis explores whether the data provides meaningful insights to address the research question (Scharp & Sanders, 2018).

This study follows Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework for thematic analysis:

1. Familiarizing with the data: transcribing and reading through the material.
2. Creating initial codes: identifying interesting parts of the data and grouping related codes.
3. Discovering themes: sorting codes into themes and gathering relevant information.
4. Reviewing themes: evaluating if the themes work with the coded data and the entire dataset, creating a 'map' of the analysis.
5. Naming and defining themes: refining each theme and the overall narrative, giving each theme a clear name and meaning.
6. Writing the narrative: writing the final analysis based on the developed themes and codes.

In this research, we slightly modified the sequence to align with the pre-established focus group script, which already includes clear guidelines and overarching themes. This allowed us to approach step three, 'Discovering themes,' more quickly, using the pre-defined themes as the foundation for step two.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Eating Out Habits**

The focus group discussions began by exploring participants' eating out habits. This theme aimed to show the frequency and occasions for eating out. The data revealed varied habits: some participants eat out regularly, while others reserve it for special occasions. Workplace dining also emerged as a common practice, with many opting for on-site cafeterias or nearby restaurants. Participants 1.2, 1.3, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, and 2.5 highlighted these trends. For example, Participant 1.2 said, "I eat at least five times a week in restaurants, or even more, as I don't really eat at home." Similarly, Participant 2.4 noted, "I eat out pretty frequently, like once or twice a week with friends. And I also always eat at the restaurant at my workplace."

On the other hand, Participant 2.5 said, "I usually only eat at restaurants on special occasions like family gatherings, birthdays, etc., once or twice a month." Similarly, Participant 3.3 mentioned, "I go to restaurants mostly on occasions, when I celebrate." These two participants view eating out as an occasional activity rather than a regular habit. The occasions for eating out vary, including special events and everyday activities. Many participants eat out to celebrate birthdays or family gatherings, but also see it as part of their social life with partners and friends, or as

a leisure activity. For example, Participant 1.1 explained, “I think I eat out once or twice a week with my friends or on a date with my boyfriend, but I also really like to celebrate special events like birthdays in restaurants.” This perspective shows that eating out can be both a routine social activity and a way to celebrate special occasions.

Interestingly, Participants 3.1 and 3.2 view dining out as an integral part of their lifestyle rather than just a leisure activity. Participant 3.1 admitted feeling guilty about eating out often, especially during holidays, but enjoys it as a hedonistic pleasure. Participant 3.2 added that dining out is part of their everyday life, not just for special occasions, eating out once a day in some form. Participant 3.5 offered a different perspective, enjoying cooking at home for cost efficiency but seeking unique dining experiences at restaurants for meals they can’t prepare themselves. This highlights that for some, eating out is about the unique experience that restaurants offer, beyond just the food.

## **Factors of Restaurant Selection**

The focus group conversation then shifted to factors participants consider important when selecting a restaurant. A recurring theme was the variety and options of meals available on the menu. Participants emphasized the need for a diverse selection to satisfy various preferences. Participant 1.3 mentioned, “The selection of food is the most important, as well as looking at the pictures,” and Participant 1.2 added, “I like to check if there’s something I would like to eat.” Many participants also highlighted the importance of an updated, available online menu, supported by Participants 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, and 2.5.

Price was another consistent factor in the decision-making process. For some, it serves as an initial filter before other criteria. Participant 3.4 stated, “I decide how much I want to pay first, and then choose something I can afford.” Additionally, value for money was important to avoid overpriced places. The atmosphere and ambience of a restaurant are crucial factors. It’s not just about the feel inside but also the initial perception based on online pictures of the interior and food. Participant 1.4 emphasized the need to see the current menu, prices, food selection, and atmosphere online. Similarly, Participant 2.1 mentioned avoiding places with unappealing atmospheres. Online platforms like Google Maps and TripAdvisor are valuable for evaluating restaurants’ location, ambience, food selection, and customer reviews. Multiple participants, including 1.1, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 2.1, 2.2, and 3.1, mentioned using these tools. Participant 1.1 highlighted the importance of reviews, stating she avoids places with at least five bad reviews to avoid wasting money on a bad experience.

Finally, the last factor that was mentioned by multiple participants, were recommendations from family, friends, and acquaintances. This points out to more trusted and reliable sources. For example, Participant 3.2 highlighted it as the most important factor, claiming that “If someone already said that ‘Oh, this one’s really good!’, then I’m more likely to try it, because I feel like I have to experience it too.” This viewpoint was also supported by Participants 2.2 and 2.4.

## **Perceptions and Practices Regarding Brunch**

The research on brunch restaurants revealed a universal appreciation for brunch food across all focus groups. Participants expressed their love for typical brunch menus, with Participant 1.4 stating, “brunch food is literally the best,” and others echoing similar sentiments.

However, brunch habits vary. Some participants, like 1.1, 1.5, 2.1, 2.2, 2.5, and 3.1, only visit brunch restaurants while on vacation. Participant 1.5 also enjoys brunch on weekends. Despite the love for brunch, logistical issues like work schedules often prevent frequent visits. Participant 3.5 highlighted this by saying, “... it’s hard to have a ‘slow morning’ because of work, but still, I like it very much.”

Participant 1.4 mentioned that it’s “hard to find occasion when you have a job,” highlighting the difficulty of finding time for brunch. Brunch is seen as more than just food; it’s a cultural phenomenon. Participants noted that part of the cost is for the experience and atmosphere. Participant 1.1 said brunch restaurants are overpriced due to their cultural appeal, and Participant 1.3 mentioned the luxurious branding of brunch. Participant 1.5 added that brunch is an ‘Instagrammable’ occasion.

However, participants also criticized the high costs. Many feel the meals are overpriced for what they are. Participant 3.3 pointed out that similar meals could be made at home for much less, citing an English breakfast as an example. The issue of pricing seemed to be particularly about Budapest, as multiple participants noted that brunch spots in the city tend to be overpriced: “although I don’t mind spending money on brunch, I would say that brunch places in Budapest are really overpriced” (Participant 1.4). Nonetheless, after talking about the prices of such restaurants, Participant 1.2 added, “I think you kind of buy the experience of these restaurants.”

## **Aesthetic Appreciation of Food Plating**

The discussion then focused on the importance of aesthetic food plating in restaurants. All participants agreed that visually appealing plating enhances their dining experience and adds value. Participant 1.1 noted that aesthetic plating influences

how one eats, while Participant 2.3 mentioned it signals precision and effort from the restaurant.

Participants also felt that appealing plating can boost their appetite and enjoyment of the meal. For example, Participant 2.1 said it adds to the dining experience, and Participant 1.4 mentioned it improves their appetite and satisfaction. Participant 3.3 emphasized that dining is a multisensory experience, involving sight and smell, and restaurants should consider this. Participant 3.2 agreed with the perspective that restaurants need to pay attention on plating and should be included in the whole experience: “I also agree with this. When someone goes to a restaurant, they also pay for the experience, not just for the food. Therefore, the experience also includes plates, which has been done aesthetically and precisely, that you might not be able to do at home. Otherwise, I could also just eat food at home. So, from restaurants, I expect a nice plate which adds value to the visuals, as I pay the price for it”.

Participants noted that the visual aspect of food often influences their choice of restaurant or meal. This is especially true when viewing online images or observing neighboring tables. Participant 3.1 explained that pictures online significantly impact decisions, even unconsciously. Participant 2.4 added that the visual presentation is the first impression of the dish and the restaurant, often seen in social media posts. Participant 3.4 also added, “A lot of times it happened to me, that I was in a restaurant, and I saw a plate there from another guest, and I just thought, I need that dish now.” This phenomenon was also mentioned by Participant 1.5, who said “...when you’re sitting in a restaurant and you see on the table next to you a plate, and you want to have the same dish immediately just based on the look.” In addition, this viewpoint was also supported by Participant 1.2, 1.3, and 1.5. Participants 2.2 and 3.1 highlighted the importance of food presentation for social media. Participant 2.2 said, “I like to post on social media, so nice plating matters.” Participant 3.1, a content creator, emphasized, “Aesthetic plates are crucial for my posts on Instagram, TikTok, etc. If they don’t look good, I don’t post them.”

However, while attractive plating can draw customers, it doesn’t guarantee they’ll return or recommend the restaurant. Participants agreed that taste, quality, service, and ambience are more influential. Participant 2.4 mentioned, “If the overall experience is good, I’d recommend it, but not just for aesthetic plating.” Participant 3.4 added, “It’s crucial as a first impression, but other factors matter too.” Participant 3.2 concluded, “Looks can attract, but revisits and recommendations depend on delicious food, good staff, and ambience.” Participants 1.2 and 2.3 mentioned they would recommend a restaurant based on the aesthetic appeal of the plates for those who prioritize looks, like for Instagram. Participant 1.2 said they would recommend a restaurant for its aesthetic appeal if the person values looks. Participant 2.3 added that even if they didn’t like it, they would still recommend it for someone who loves aesthetic plating.



Additionally, some participants noted that they could overlook plating if the food is delicious, the portions are good, and the value for money is fair. This was especially true for rustic and authentic Hungarian restaurants. Participant 2.4 mentioned that despite simple presentation, the food's flavor makes them return frequently. However, on top of all of this, one interesting comment came up by Participant 1.3, who expressed that there could be extremes in food plating, especially in fine dining settings, where the visual aspects sometimes overshadow the quantity or even the food itself.

## **Overall Dining Experience at Berries & Bite Brunch**

The focus group conversation continued to focus on the participants' recent experience at Berries & Bite Brunch. Most participants in all three focus groups seemed to agree on Berries & Bite Brunch's minimalistic approach to interior design and thought they could have had potential to make it nicer even with attention on smaller details. While some did not have a problem with the more clear and simple approach, many people would have preferred a more 'cosy' or 'rustic' environment. Participants appreciated the combination of berry and white colors in the interior design. They generally found the food's taste and quality to be positive, describing it as "good," "really good," "delicious," or "really delicious." However, some noted that while the food was good, it wasn't extraordinary.

The visual presentation of the food was praised for its color harmony and appealing plating. Participants liked how the vivid colors of the ingredients contrasted with the pastel tones of the plateware. They also appreciated the precise arrangement and shaping of the ingredients. The plateware itself was noted for its appropriate size, shape, and color, enhancing the overall dining experience. Participants felt that the plating style at Berries & Bite Brunch was similar to other brunch places, making it visually pleasing but not distinctive. This sentiment was shared across all focus groups, with many participants agreeing through non-verbal cues like nodding. While participants appreciated the creative concept of berries in the logo, interior, and menu, they suggested that the restaurant could have done more to emphasize this theme. They recommended incorporating berries or berry colors consistently in each dish to make the restaurant's identity more recognizable. However, some participants cautioned against overdoing this theme.

## **Brand Experience at Berries & Bite Brunch**

The discussion continued to explore the brand experience participants encountered at Berries & Bite Brunch, encompassing the sensory, affective, behavioural, and finally intellectual dimensions of it.

## Sensory Dimension

Participants discussed the sensory dimension of their brand experience, focusing on the engagement of their five senses while dining. Visually, most were engaged by the restaurant's interior design, color scheme, and wall art, though some found the wall information overwhelming. Participant 1.2 noted the unified design but found the wall motifs a bit much. Participant 2.4 suggested that staff attire could be more berries-themed to enhance the visual experience. The presentation of food also played a significant role, with Participant 1.2 and Participant 2.5 stating that the plating exceeded their expectations and enhanced their sensory experience. Participants noted that dining at the restaurant stimulated their sense of taste, with many describing the food as delicious. The presentation of the food also enhanced their appetite and taste experience. For example, Participant 2.1 mentioned that seeing the food improved their appetite, while Participant 1.1 said the plating's colors and arrangement made them enjoy the meal more.

Regarding the auditory experience, feedback varied. Some participants enjoyed the background music and the sounds of other diners, finding it added to the atmosphere. However, others found the noise overwhelming or distracting. For instance, Participant 1.2 enjoyed the music and ambient sounds, while Participant 3.3 found the noise too loud. Participant 2.2 wished for more background music. Additionally, some participants noted that the texture of certain foods, like crunchy elements, slightly enhanced their auditory experience, though this was not a universal sentiment. The focus groups were generally disappointed with the restaurant's lack of appealing smells, which are often crucial in food experiences.

Many felt that the aroma of freshly baked goods or coffee could have enhanced the ambience. Participant 2.2 emphasized this by saying, "...for the smell, I really missed it – when I pass by restaurants and they have a good smell, I immediately consider going in, so that could be a huge plus actually." Participant 1.1 agreed, noting the absence of these smells. Additionally, the sense of touch was largely ignored, with Participant 1.1 stating, "Touching is not relevant I think."

## Affective Dimension

The discussion then explored the emotional responses and connections participants felt at Berries & Bite Brunch. Most participants felt pleasant and calm, especially when enjoying good food and company. Many expressed excitements when selecting

meals, waiting for food, and seeing the dishes: “I got really excited when looking at the menu... just reading the ingredients made me feel hyped” (Participant 1.4).

However, these feelings didn’t translate into a deeper emotional connection with the brand. Participant 1.1 said, “I think I didn’t really have any kind of deep feelings, I felt pleasant in the restaurant”. Some negative emotions were also noted. Participant 1.2 mentioned feeling excited but also experienced negative feelings due to a neutral and grumpy waiter. Participant 1.5 added, “...it can be a bit of a mood killer when the waiter seemed irritated by the guests”.

Regarding food presentation, some participants felt that aesthetic plating indicated the restaurant’s attention to detail, fostering trust and positive feelings towards the brand. Despite the positive emotions from the aesthetic food presentation, many participants felt that Berries & Bite Brunch’s plating was not unique enough to create a deeper emotional connection. Participant 3.2 noted, “I wouldn’t say I felt closer to the brand, as this plate can be found in most brunch restaurants.” Participant 3.5 agreed, saying, “I didn’t feel a deep connection as it was not that special”. Participants clarified that their affective experience was influenced by multiple factors, such as taste, ambiance, and staff interaction, rather than just the food presentation. Participant 1.2 mentioned, “I think I got the wow feeling from the plate, but my feelings towards the brand were influenced by various things.” Participant 2.4 added, “Although the plating was nice, it didn’t really help to build an emotional connection with the brand.”

## Behavioural Dimension

The dialogue then explored the behavioral dimension of the brand experience at Berries & Bite Brunch. A common behavior was taking photos of meals and sharing them on social media, driven by the aesthetic appeal of the plates. Participant 3.1 noted, “I actually made pictures only from the plates, so that ‘behavior’ was evoked by them.” Most participants said they would share their experiences with family and friends rather than writing reviews. Participant 2.1 mentioned, “I wouldn’t write a review, but I would tell my friends and family how the experience was if they ask about it.” Participant 3.5 added, “To write a review, a restaurant needs to be either exceptional or really bad.” Additionally, the food presentation inspired many participants to consider replicating the dishes at home.

## Intellectual Dimension

The focus groups had mixed responses regarding the intellectual engagement at Berries & Bite Brunch. Some participants (1.4, 1.5, 2.1, 3.2) were intellectually stimulated by the menu variety, special ingredients, or educational wall art about

berries. Participants 2.2 and 2.5 offered unique perspectives on the restaurant's business model. Participant 2.5 thought starting a business in the breakfast and brunch sector might not be as challenging as assumed: "I had a thought, that it wouldn't be that complicated to start a business in this field." Participant 2.2 found it interesting how a simple meal like breakfast could be transformed into an upscale experience: "From a simple breakfast, you can create something that feels fancy, available for the upper class." Others, like Participants 1.2 and 3.4, were skeptical about a restaurant's ability to evoke intellectual thoughts. Participant 1.2 said, "I enjoyed the food here, but I wouldn't say it particularly sparked any deep thoughts or curiosity in me." Participant 3.4 added, "To be honest, I wouldn't say that any restaurant can really provoke thoughts – maybe creativity in terms of the ingredients and how the food is prepared but that's it."

Participants were divided on whether food presentation could enhance intellectual experience. Some felt it was purely aesthetic and didn't stimulate intellectual curiosity. Participant 1.2 said, "Their plating style, while beautiful, doesn't drive intellectual engagement but enhances the overall experience." Participant 2.1 agreed, stating, "Plating cannot evoke intellectual thoughts." However, Participant 3.4 noted that while Berries & Bite Brunch's presentation might not engage diners intellectually, other formats like fine dining and molecular gastronomy could offer deeper intellectual stimulation.

## **End-of-Discussion Insights**

The focus group discussion highlighted the importance of plating in shaping guests' experiences and perceptions of a restaurant brand. Participants agreed that aesthetic plating is crucial, especially in the social media age, where it can serve as free advertising. However, they also emphasized that visual appeal alone is not enough; taste, service quality, and ambiance are equally important for a holistic brand experience. Participant 2.1 noted that the importance of plating varies by restaurant type. For example, nice plating is expected in a brunch restaurant but might be confusing in a traditional Hungarian restaurant. This suggests that the role of plating depends on the restaurant's style.

Regarding Berries & Bite Brunch, participants had mixed views. While some found the plating to be the most positive aspect of their experience, they agreed that a good restaurant brand cannot rely solely on presentation. Participant 1.2 mentioned that the appealing presentation saved their overall experience, despite the food being just good and the atmosphere and staff not being exceptional. On the other hand, Participant 3.2 suggested that Berries & Bite Brunch needs to offer something more unique in its plating to add bigger value to the dining experience. Although the plating was aesthetically pleasing, she argued that good plating has

become a standard expectation, and therefore, for the restaurant to stand out, it needs a bit more special touch: “I think most of the brunch restaurants follow the same patterns, and this restaurant didn’t give a plus – so to be engaged with all these dimensions of brand experience, I think a bit more is needed.”

## **Contextual Insights**

The focus group findings revealed two distinct categories of eating out preferences: some participants view it as a regular, everyday activity, while others save it for special occasions. Many participants dine out almost daily, supporting Walker’s (2017) observation that meals consumed away from home have increased over time. Those who frequently dine out do so as part of their social life, work routines, or lifestyle, validating that dining establishments serve purposes beyond just eating (Astuti & Hanan, 2016; Fieldhouse, 1996). Conversely, a small subgroup only dines out on special occasions with close people, highlighting the symbolic power of food as a means to demonstrate belonging and hospitality (Fieldhouse, 1996). Their experiences confirm literature’s focus on ‘commensality’ and the sense of community that eating embodies (Fieldhouse, 1996; Koponen & Mustonen, 2020; Pilcher, 2012).

Additionally, some participants found restaurants suitable for various purposes, such as casual meetups, work lunches, or special events, highlighting the multifaceted role of restaurants in contemporary life. These results align with studies indicating that food consumption has evolved into a multifaceted social and individual experience (Crowther, 2018; Pilcher, 2012). During the focus group discussions, participants highlighted several key factors influencing their restaurant choices. The decision-making process is multifaceted, involving both practical and experiential factors. Google Maps and online reviews serve as digital reference points, while ambiance, food variety, and price remain important.

A frequently mentioned point was the importance of menu variety, reflecting participants’ varied tastes. The need for up-to-date online menus was also emphasized, aligning with literature that shows diners increasingly rely on online resources. In fact, 84% of diners examine the menu online before visiting a restaurant (National Restaurant Association, 2019), highlighting the need for restaurants to maintain an active digital presence. The atmosphere of a restaurant is also vital, as dining out is about the entire experience, not just the food. Interestingly, participants form initial impressions based on online images of a restaurant’s interiors, décor, and dishes, indicating that what diners see online heavily influences their decision to visit.

Participants indicated that platforms like Google Maps are crucial in their restaurant decision-making, offering comprehensive evaluations and insights. Peer reviews, both positive and negative, significantly influence their choices, highlighting the

importance of restaurants providing outstanding customer experiences. This aligns with the trend of increasing technological integration in the restaurant industry, predicted to be fully digital by 2030 (National Restaurant Association, 2019). Despite the rise of digital platforms, personal recommendations from trusted individuals remain valuable. Price is also a key consideration, with participants seeking value for their expenditure without sacrificing quality.

Interestingly, themes like sustainability and health consciousness, emphasized in recent studies (Euler, 2022; Georgiev, n.d.; Owner, n.d.; Voicu, 2023a), were absent from the focus group discussions. This suggests a potential gap between industry trends and the actual preferences of the participants.

Participants admired brunch for its food selection and overall experience, associating it with vacation, pleasure, and leisure. This aligns with literature describing brunch as a symbol of comfort and convenience (Ternikar, 2014). They also viewed brunch as luxurious and comforting, echoing Ternikar's (2014) characterization of it as gastronomic luxury. Brunch's digital appeal was noted, with participants seeing it as an 'Instagrammable' occasion, supported by sources like Hartley (2021) and the Future Food Strategy Group (2018). However, participants raised concerns about logistics and pricing, particularly in Budapest, where they felt brunch was overpriced. This contrasts with the Future Food Strategy Group's (2018) claim of casual, affordable pricing.

Participants highlighted the importance of aesthetic food plating in enhancing the dining experience. A well-constructed plate was seen as a sign of a restaurant's attention to detail and quality. This aligns with literature emphasizing the role of visual presentation in dining satisfaction (Cifci et al., 2021; Michel et al., 2014). The visual appeal of food influenced participants' choices of restaurants and dishes. They often based their initial impressions on the appearance of dishes and were swayed by beautifully plated food at neighboring tables. This supports research showing that visual cues significantly impact eating habits and food selection (Spence et al., 2014; Campo et al., 2017; Spence, 2017).

Participants noted the use of technology to assess the visual appeal of dishes, highlighting the importance of well-presented food in attracting diners and serving as a marketing tool. This connection between aesthetic plating and social media was emphasized, especially by content creators, aligning with literature on the trend of sharing food experiences online (Gambetti & Han, 2022; Spence et al., 2022). While aesthetics influenced initial impressions and dining choices, they were not the sole determinants of repeat visits or recommendations. The overall dining experience, including taste, food quality, service, and ambiance, was more crucial for customer loyalty. For some, especially in authentic Hungarian restaurants or familiar places, taste could overshadow the need for aesthetic plating, showing that flavor sometimes takes precedence over visual appeal.

One participant raised a concern that extreme aesthetic presentation in fine dining can overshadow practical aspects like quantity and essence of a dish. This aligns with Paaki et al.'s (2019) research, which emphasizes that aesthetics should also serve a practical purpose. Feedback from the dining experience at Berries & Bite Brunch highlighted criticism of its minimalist interior. Participants desired a more 'cosy' or 'rustic' ambiance, feeling the design was inauthentic and overly targeted at younger diners. This suggests that while trendy, the minimalist design may not effectively differentiate the restaurant. Berries & Bite Brunch might benefit from revisiting their interior design to better align with their brand identity and audience.

Feedback on the food at Berries & Bite Brunch was positive regarding taste and quality, but it wasn't seen as unique or outstanding. This aligns with McCracken's (2022) view that success in the restaurant industry requires more than just good food; it needs a unique culinary identity. Participants praised the visual appeal of the food plating, noting the effective use of color and arrangement, which aligns with guidelines in the literature (Campo et al., 2017; Spence & Piqueras-Fiszman, 2014). However, the presentation style was not seen as unique, suggesting that while Berries & Bite Brunch excelled in aesthetics, they did not establish a distinctive brand identity through their plating techniques. The 'Berries' theme at Berries & Bite Brunch was appreciated but could be more consistently integrated, especially in plating. Participants suggested incorporating berries or the color palette in each dish to strengthen brand identity. Dabeva (2012) emphasizes the importance of harmonizing branding elements to express the business concept. Enhancing the theme's expression across all touchpoints might resonate better with customers. Regarding the brand experience, the interior design and color schemes created a visually pleasant atmosphere, though some participants desired more warmth and found certain visual elements overwhelming. Visual cohesion is crucial for a cozy and engaging environment. Suggestions included staff uniforms aligning with the berries theme to enhance visual experience.

The auditory experience received mixed feedback. Balancing background noise is essential, as some diners prefer a lively atmosphere while others seek quiet for conversation. Background music should be carefully chosen to cater to diverse preferences. Loud conversations are often unavoidable in a full restaurant. The olfactory dimension was a missed opportunity at Berries & Bite Brunch. Participants suggested that appealing smells like freshly baked products or coffee could enhance the dining experience, setting expectations and evoking anticipation. The lack of engaging scents might be due to the types of dishes served or preparation methods. Touch was negligible in shaping the overall experience.

Taste, primarily related to the plating, will be discussed in the next section. The affective dimension showed a mix of positive emotions and missed opportunities for deeper connections. Participants felt a general pleasantness, enjoying good



food and company, which created a soothing atmosphere. The excitement of meal selection and presentation indicated success in creating moments of heightened emotion. However, these feelings were not deep enough to foster strong emotional bonds, potentially affecting long-term brand loyalty or advocacy. The role of staff significantly influences affective experiences. Neutral or grumpy waiters introduced negative elements, reducing overall positive emotions. Consistent staff training and a friendly atmosphere are crucial, as highlighted by Mosley (2007) and Khan and Fatma (2017), who emphasize the importance of staff behavior in shaping brand experiences.

Regarding the behavioral dimension, participants' engagement varied. They shared their experiences with family and friends but did not write online reviews unless the experience was exceptionally good or poor. This suggests room for improvement to encourage positive reviews. The restaurant's wall art not only provided visual appeal but also motivated some participants to include more berries in their diets. This aligns with literature on behavioral brand experiences, which states that brand interaction can encourage physical acts and lifestyle changes (Bapat & Thanigan, 2016; Beig & Nika, 2019; Hwang et al., 2021; Pina & Dias, 2021).

Not all feedback was positive. Some participants felt their interaction with Berries & Bite Brunch was limited to dining, missing deeper brand engagement. Intellectual experiences varied. Some participants found the menu's diversity, unique ingredients, and informative wall art intellectually engaging. Others discussed how brunch restaurants elevate a simple meal for a wealthier audience, reflecting on the brand's influence. This aligns with Ternikar (2014), who describes brunch as a symbol of gastronomic luxury. However, some participants were skeptical about the intellectual stimulation a restaurant can provide. While culinary creativity was appreciated, it didn't always lead to broader cognitive reflections. This highlights that intellectual ambiance may not resonate with everyone, as what stimulates one diner may not affect another.

## **Addressing the Research Questions**

It is crucial to highlight again that this study was conducted in an exploratory manner, guided by research questions rather than predefined hypotheses. This approach was chosen due to the significant gap in existing literature concerning the relationship between food presentation and brand experience in restaurants. Thus, the subsequent section will address the posed research questions in detail in order to offer foundational insights into this area.

RQ1A: How does food presentation in restaurants influence the sensory brand experience of diners?

At Berries & Bite Brunch, plating significantly shaped the sensory brand experience, impacting visual, auditory, smell, taste, and touch perceptions (Huaman-Ramirez & Merunka, 2019; Mostafa & Kasamani, 2020; Moreira et al., 2017; Pina & Dias, 2021; Shamim & Butt, 2013). Food presentation acted as a key brand touchpoint (Huaman-Ramirez & Merunka, 2019). The visual dimension was the most dominant, with participants appreciating the color contrasts and food arrangement, enhancing the visual experience (Huaman-Ramirez & Merunka, 2019; Hwang et al., 2021; Mostafa & Kasamani, 2020). Plating also influenced taste, as the visual appeal of the food enhanced participants' appetites (Huaman-Ramirez & Merunka, 2019).

Interestingly, plating slightly influenced the auditory experience, with some participants noting that crunchy textures enhanced their auditory dimension. This aligns with literature on the role of sounds in dining experiences (Schifferstein et al., 2020; Spence & Piqueras-Fiszman, 2014; Zampini & Spence, 2004). However, there was a negligible correlation between food plating and the sensory experiences of smell and touch. The underestimation of smell in food experiences is noted in studies, as many people associate smell sensations with taste (Schifferstein et al., 2020; Spence, 2015). The type of dishes at Berries & Bite Brunch, like toasts, may not emit strong aromas, explaining the overlooked role of smell. Touch could be an area for exploration, as textures and temperatures could add engagement (Kravchyk, 2022; Schifferstein et al., 2020; Spence & Piqueras-Fiszman, 2014).

RQ1B: How does food presentation in restaurants influence the affective brand experience of diners?

In the settings of Berries & Bite Brunch, while plating played a role in shaping the affective brand experience – encompassing a variety of feelings, emotions, and moods evoked during interactions with businesses and signifying the emotional bond between consumer and brand (Bapat & Thanigan, 2016; Beig & Nika, 2019; Huaman-Ramirez & Merunka, 2019; Hwang et al., 2021; Mostafa & Kasamani, 2020; Pina & Dias, 2021; Shamim & Butt, 2013) – participants pointed out that it was not the only factor determining it. Several participants viewed Berries & Bite Brunch's aesthetic plating as a direct reflection of the restaurant's precision and dedication to quality. This perception of the restaurant's commitment to detail, as seen by the plating, generated a sense of trust and enhanced more positive sentiments towards the brand. Moreover, as mentioned previously, when the dishes arrived at the tables, participants also mentioned the feeling of excitement evoked by the overall picture of the dish. While the plates were aesthetically pleasing, the food presentation lacked uniqueness, making it hard to form a strong emotional bond with the Berries & Bite Brunch brand. Participants noted that the plating style was common and could be found in many other brunch places. This aligns with Dabeva's (2012) view that differentiation is crucial in today's competitive environment. Without a unique identity, restaurants may struggle to connect emotionally with customers

and stand out from competitors (Bistrohub, 2020; Kakadiya, 2023; McCracken, 2022; Robitaille, 2023).

Participants noted that the overall dining experience is crucial. Plating alone doesn't entirely shape their emotional connection to a brand; it's influenced by factors like food flavor, restaurant ambiance, and staff interactions. This multifaceted nature of dining experiences is supported by Ivkov et al. (2016) and Merckaert (2023b). While Berries & Bite Brunch's plating fostered positive sentiments, its lack of uniqueness lessened its impact. The overall emotional bond with the brand was shaped by the entire dining experience, not just the food presentation.

RQ1C: How does food presentation in restaurants influence the behavioural brand experience of diners?

The behavioural brand experience at Berries & Bite Brunch was notably influenced by the restaurant's food presentation. Participants frequently photographed their meals and shared them on social media, particularly Instagram, due to the visual appeal of the dishes. This aligns with the trend of sharing food images online, often described as 'camera eats first' (Gambetti & Han, 2022; Wachyuni & Yusuf, 2021; Yong et al., 2020). Beyond digital sharing, the attractive plating inspired some diners to replicate the dishes at home, highlighting the powerful impact of visually appealing food. One participant even tried a dish outside his comfort zone because it looked appealing, showing how presentation can influence preferences and purchasing decisions (Campo et al., 2017; Spence, 2017). In summary, plating can encourage diners to take and share photos, inspire home cooking, and even try new dishes, significantly shaping their dining behavior and choices.

RQ1D: How does food presentation in restaurants influence the intellectual brand experience of diners?

Participants had varied opinions on whether food presentation at Berries & Bite Brunch stimulated intellectual curiosity. Some saw it as a tool for culinary creativity and exploration, wondering about ingredient pairings and how to replicate or improve them. This reflects both analytical and creative thinking. Others felt the presentation was mainly aesthetic and didn't evoke deeper intellectual engagement. One participant noted that while Berries & Bite Brunch's plating might not achieve significant intellectual engagement, fine dining and molecular gastronomy could stimulate profound intellectual curiosity due to their innovative techniques. Thus, while some diners found the plating intellectually stimulating, others viewed it as merely adding to the sensory experience. The level of intellectual engagement seems to depend on individual perspectives and the broader dining context.

RQ1: How does food presentation in restaurants influence the overall brand experience of diners?

The presentation of food significantly impacts how guests perceive a restaurant brand, especially in the age of social media. Participants noted that a well-plated dish can serve as free advertising, making a strong first impression both in person and online. However, they agreed that taste, service quality, and ambiance are also crucial in shaping the dining experience. The type or theme of a restaurant and its target audience also influence the importance of plating. Effective plating strategies may vary based on these factors. For Berries & Bite Brunch, some participants found the plating to be a highlight, while others saw it as a standard expectation, emphasizing the need for continuous innovation. In summary, while plating plays a significant role, the overall brand experience is shaped by a combination of elements, not just one factor.

## **CONCLUSION**

This research explores how food presentation in brunch restaurants influences brand experience. It highlights that visually appealing dishes enhance dining experiences and reflect a restaurant's quality and dedication. The visual appeal significantly impacts customers' first impressions and choices, aligning with previous studies. In the digital age, diners often use social media to evaluate and share their dining experiences. Attractive food presentation can draw customers and serve as free marketing through user-generated content. Restaurants must meet these visual expectations to maintain a strong online brand image, with platforms like Google Maps playing a crucial role in dining decisions.

The research shows that food presentation influences various dimensions of brand experience, though the extent varies. For sensory brand experience (RQ1A), food presentation mainly affects visual and taste perceptions, with minimal impact on smell and touch. Other factors like interior design, décor, sounds, and aromas also contribute to sensory experiences. Restaurants should focus on appealing plating, thematic design, balanced sounds, and pleasant aromas to enhance the dining atmosphere. For affective brand experience (RQ1B), while food presentation elicits positive emotions, its impact is lessened due to similarities with other brunch places. Factors like staff behavior and overall atmosphere play a more crucial role in influencing emotions. Therefore, a strategy focusing on staff interactions and a unique ambiance is essential for deeper emotional connections and brand loyalty. For RQ1C (behavioural brand experience), food presentation at the restaurant encouraged diners to photograph, share online, and explore culinary options. Décor and wall art also influenced behavior. Restaurants should focus on both food presentation and overall ambiance to boost brand engagement. For RQ1D (intellectual brand experience), food presentation inspired creativity and analytical thinking in some diners, while

others saw it as merely aesthetic. Diverse menus and unique ingredients also played a role. However, the restaurant may struggle to provide deep intellectual engagement for all guests. Efforts to create an intellectually stimulating atmosphere are positive but may not resonate with everyone.

While plating captures diners' attention and creates a first impression, it is just one part of the overall brand experience. Modern diners seek a holistic experience that includes the taste of the food, restaurant ambiance, quality of service, and the entire dining journey. Restaurants should adopt a comprehensive strategy addressing all touchpoints to create a memorable brand experience. Additionally, the importance of plating varies by restaurant type, theme, and target audience. Brunch places, for example, often focus on being 'Instagrammable' to appeal to their digital-savvy clientele. For establishments like Berries & Bite Brunch, while plating can be a distinct element for some visitors, others see it as a basic expectation. This highlights the evolving standards in contemporary dining. With good plating becoming a standard, restaurants must innovate to stand out in a competitive market.

In today's dining landscape, where the experience extends beyond food, plating enhances the brand experience. Unique plating techniques can make lasting impressions, especially in the digital age. Different restaurants need varied plating strategies to meet their target audiences' expectations. However, plating is just one element of a restaurant's overall brand experience, which is a multifaceted interplay of various factors. Section title should be "Conclusion," not "Conclusions." Provide discussion of the overall coverage of the chapter and concluding remarks.

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