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MINIMALISTIC BRANDING AND TRUST IN AI TECHNOLOGIES

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Abstract: This paper explores the relationship between minimalist branding and trust in artificial intelligence (AI) technologies across Bulgarian and English-speaking users. Drawing on branding and design theory, the study evaluates three hypotheses through a structured survey and correlation analysis. The results reveal no significant differences between language groups but highlight strong positive correlations between perceived minimalism and both trust and understanding of AI. These findings contribute to branding and marketing research by offering insights into how simplicity in visual communication can enhance technological trust and user perception.

Keywords: Minimalistic, Branding, AI, Marketing, Consumer Trust.

JEL: M31, M37, L86.

Introduction

The widespread integration of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies into everyday life, especially in the purchase of goods and services, has dramatically changed the way consumers interact with brands and businesses. AI systems, ranging from intelligent assistants to algorithmic recommendations, are now integrated into the daily lives of millions of consumers, and the number of users is expected to continue to grow (**Shin, 2021**). Despite rapid technological advances, consumer trust remains a key factor in the adoption and use of AI and is already affecting brand management. Trust is directly related to consumer acceptance, engagement, or rejection of AI-driven technologies (**Woolley & Glikson, 2020**).

Branding techniques have also undergone major changes in recent years. An increasing number of organizations are moving away from conventional branding strategies that rely on prominent visual identities, slogans, and extensive advertising, preferring minimalist branding instead. As seen with the advent of digital marketing tools, traditional advertising has taken a backseat - and the same is currently being observed in the creation of brand identity and image. Minimalist branding emphasizes the conscious simplification of the visual and verbal components of the brand in order to prioritize simplicity, clarity and sophistication (**Wang, et al., 2023**). This approach to creating a brand concept is consistent with the overarching trend in minimalist design, emphasizing functionality, transparency and a focus on the user. Large corporations such as Apple, Google and OpenAI have adopted minimalist strategies in product design and brand messaging, often using clear logos, monochromatic color schemes and text focused on the product attributes rather than marketing statements.

In the larger context of AI technologies, often viewed as complex, enigmatic, or even unpredictable (**Rayhan, 2023**) – the application of minimalist branding can be essential in creating trust for certain brands and companies. Visually simple and message-oriented brand presentation can convey transparency in communication and trustworthiness, reducing consumer anxiety and increasing perceived authenticity.

This article aims to explore the impact of minimalist branding techniques on consumer trust in AI-based products and services. This study advances the relationship between branding and technology acceptance literature by examining the relationship between visual simplicity in brand presentation and consumer perceptions of AI trustworthiness.

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Based on the theoretical foundation and the survey design, the study tests the following hypotheses:

- H1: There is a significant difference in perceived trust in AI through minimalist branding between different language groups (Bulgarian and English respondents).
- H2: There is a significant positive correlation between perceived minimalism and trust in AI within each language group.
- H3: Higher perception of minimalist branding positively correlates with better understanding and perceived safety of AI products, within both Bulgarian and English respondent groups.

Literature review

Business function changes happen frequently. Adaptation in marketing as a management unit is common in companies and will continue to happen. Minimalist branding is a contemporary marketing concept that reduces the visual and verbal elements of a brand to emphasize simplicity, clarity and functionality of the product. This idea aligns with major design trends and is often related to the adoption of accessibility, authenticity, and customer-centric values to get the desired closeness—specifically, from brand to user (**Luffarelli, et al., 2018**). Simultaneously, studies on consumer trust in artificial intelligence highlight the significance of algorithmic openness, explainability, and ethical design. Although these topics have been studied separately, little academic attention has been paid to how minimalist branding can affect trust in AI technologies.

Branding, Trust and Artificial Intelligence

Since ancient times, branding has existed as a strategic tool that distinguished different products. Modern marketing shows branding as an essential asset that shapes consumer perceptions, differentiates offerings, and fosters long-term customer relationships. As Naidenov claims, human values are not static but dynamically shaped by social and economic conditions (**Naidenov, 2014**). I. These self-values guide perception, behavior, and trust across multiple domains, including technology and marketing communication in recent years, thanks to digitalization, branding has come to represent the entire customer experience provided by a company to its customers. A brand can function as a foundation for a company's comprehensive strategy, synchronizing all business actions with its fundamental identity (**Dimova, 2018**). Aaker confirms in his studies that the classical structure of the strategic tool works through visual identity, tone of voice, brand personality, and consistent messaging (**Aaker, 1996**). Strong and consistent brands are frequently linked to excellence, trustworthiness, and emotional resonance. Those factors are essential for establishing consumer confidence. Historically, numerous managers perceived branding merely as a function of logos, typography, and color schemes; however, this perspective has transformed. Clearly, branding as a process has evolved - from being a final objective to a continuous method for brand reinforcement through positive experiences and emotional bonds established by quality goods and/or services (**Lemon & Verhoef, 2016**).

The concept of "trust" in business is less emphasized among the economic academic community, particularly in the field of marketing. Trust is characterized as the consumer's willingness to depend on a brand despite inconsistencies and vulnerabilities (**Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001**). In the marketing context, trust is developed through positive past experiences, perceived competence, integrity and shared values – a stronghold for good brand perception. A trusted brand is the one that provides its promises and consistent action to the consumers (**Iglesias, et al., 2011**). A brand that maintains stability and transparency is more likely to trust consumers and create a long-term

relationship with them. Therefore, it is extremely important that the brand's image and identity are not diluted, be it by internal or external factors.

Artificial intelligence presents new challenges and expectations regarding user trust (**Pasquale, 2015**). This complex technology, especially those based on machine learning, is often characterized by opacity and difficulty of algorithms, which can hinder user understanding and raise concerns about accountability and fairness (**Mittelstadt, et al., 2016**). There is also a psychological attitude among users to distrust by presumption. Therefore, before implementing and using such technology, companies need to be aware of all processes - from development by software engineers, through testing processes and final verification of the results. Especially for diffusion models, which are specialized in creating visual elements, a well-trained algorithm must be in order (**Chen, et al., 2025**). As a result, trust in AI is influenced not only by the performance of technology but also by how it is communicated and positioned by the brand. AI nowadays is connected to so many internet platforms, social media and mobile applications. It has accelerated and will continue to do it (**Kolyandov & Radev, 2023**).

Recent research suggests that explainability, perceived autonomy, and ethical design are essential for cultivating trust in AI-powered systems. Therefore, some organizations have committed significant efforts and resources in recent years to develop their own AI usage rules. Meanwhile, organizations that implement transparent and accountable branding strategies may reduce customer concerns and enhance rates of acceptance (**Woolley & Glikson, 2020**). In this regard, branding can serve as a link between the complex nature of AI and the consumer demand for transparency and trust, generating new understandings for companies. As AI becomes more integrated into the consumer experience, the convergence of brand and trust becomes increasingly vital.

Minimalist Branding: Concept and Characteristics

Minimalism is by nature a complex and multi-layered paradigm, the application of which goes beyond aesthetic dimensions. It is found both as a design approach and as a marketing tool in creating a brand philosophy, promoting clarity, simplicity, and symbiosis of the few elements from which it is created. Its core principles – such as “less is more”, the use of white space, visual balance and selective color contrast – contribute to consumer attention and the clarity of the brand's message to its target audience (**Odak, 2021**). In the context of branding, minimalism has a particular impact on the visual identity of the brand, often starting with the logo and extending to the product packaging, web interfaces, digital channels and why not even the thought with which consumers remember it. It is especially effective if those brands are perceived in the mind of the consumers as premium or luxury (**Kapferer, 2014**). The approach is established from the minimalist design movements in the past that emphasize clarity, functionality, and user experience. This strategy has gained popularity among companies seeking to convey trust, modernity, and focus—especially in technology-related sectors, including hybrid industries such as Fintech, Insurtech, etc. Minimalist branding reduces visual noise and allows a product, service, or their message to stand out in "crowded digital environments", helping to enhance perceptions of authenticity and transparency. Studies confirmed that minimalism as a concept for the brand had led to easier memorization to the mind of the consumers (**Lekaj, et al., 2023**).

The initial interaction between a corporation and its customer is a critical point of contact. In such contact, the element that stands out first is the logo. It significantly influences emotional responses and brand awareness among customers, especially over time. This intangible asset is essential in creating a brand. Studies have shown that logos characterized by simplicity and minimalist attributes tend to achieve greater memorability and facilitate cognitive processing compared to those with

excessive parts, design complexity, and oversaturation (**Park, et al., 2013**). Minimalist design typically uses basic geometric shapes, limited color schemes, and polished surfaces to create refined and cohesive images (**He, 2022**). Most of the time their base is either from circular, square or triangle form. While this minimalism may enhance impressions of sophistication, other studies show that it does not consistently strengthen brand qualities such as honesty or trustworthiness. Favier and colleagues found out that ‘elaborate designs’ can be found out as “smokescreens” to the consumers and hide the flaws of the products/ services they serve. The simpler is the design, the more “up-to-date” it is considered to the consumers (**Favier, et al., 2019**).

These days, we have many companies that are leaders in their industry that rely on minimalist branding as part of their overall business strategy. But as “industry” is said, it really is a defining factor to a brand where it operates, as Carolina Guerrero found in her thesis (**Guerrero, 2024**). For example, consumer technology giant Apple uses a clean white background, minimal copy, and a simple logo to highlight the features and elegance of its devices. From other side Google has reduced the complexity of its visual identity over time, including redesigning its logo and simplifying interfaces across its different platforms. One of the recent innovators - OpenAI, known for developing ChatGPT and other AI technologies, have embraced minimalist design across their platforms – favoring blank spaces, a neutral palette, and product-focused messaging that emphasizes usability and clarity (**Sebiat, 2023**). These businesses demonstrate how minimalist branding strategies are applied not only for aesthetic cohesion, but also to support strategic goals such as building consumer trust in their own brand. When faced with complex and often opaque AI technologies, consumers may find the simplicity of design reassuring and providing enough trust to at least not distance themselves from the business. In this way, minimalist branding can function as a symbolic sign of control, trustworthiness, and the intention for ethical design (**Santos, et al., 2022**). As AI technologies continue to evolve, minimalist branding can offer a communication strategy that bridges the cognitive gap between complex algorithmic systems and everyday users.

Methodology

Sampling

The sampling consists of **213** (**106** and **107** separate surveys) from respondents from Bulgaria as 1st domain, as well as other European countries as second domain (we will consider them as English-speaking further in the article). The individuals have an academic and/or professional background in economics, marketing, design or technology (and related). The participants age group is different – *young adults* from **18 to 25 years of age**, *adults* from **26 to 45 years of age** and *older professionals/ academics* from **46- 65 years of age**. The sample includes both students and professionals, providing perspective across different stages of familiarity with artificial intelligence technologies and branding as a concept.

Data collection

The method to collect the data was via online survey. The used channels to communicate the survey were both online and offline:

- Social media channels: Channels as LinkedIn, Facebook (study groups) and Instagram were used to reach broader audience in both surveys.
- Physical flyers and posters with QR code were distributed in social and co-working places in Sofia, Bulgaria to target better on the national audience.

Questionnaire design

The questionnaire is structured in 4 sections:

- The first section is a screening question, that has the function to confirm whether the respondent had prior exposure or interest in AI-driven products.
- The second section is “Attitude towards minimalistic branding (Q2.1-Q2.6). Through scales the section focused on questions for the idea of visual simplicity, perceived trust, and emotional responses related to AI product branding.
- The third section focused on the AI trust factors (Q3.1-Q3.6). The section explored how branding elements influenced trust in AI in the respondents, their perceive on safety, clarity and decision-making relation towards AI.
- The fourth and last section consistent of three demographic questions – gender, age, and education level.

Analysis and results

This section presents the statistical analysis, results from the non-parametric tests, and interpretations linked to the hypothesis.

Descriptive statistics and demographics

Figure 1 – Gender of respondents

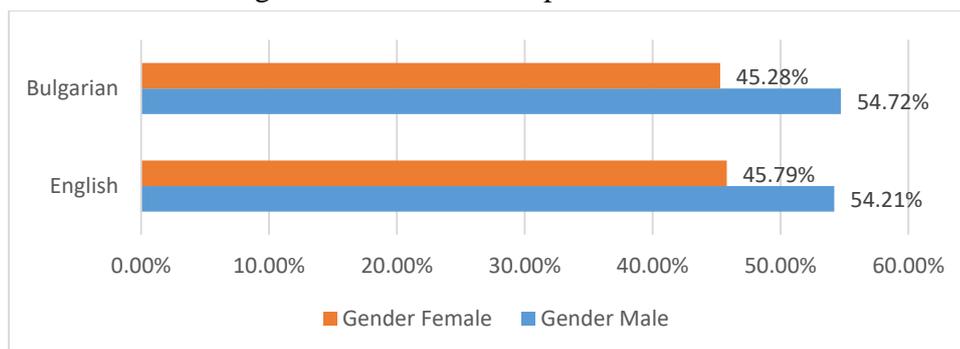
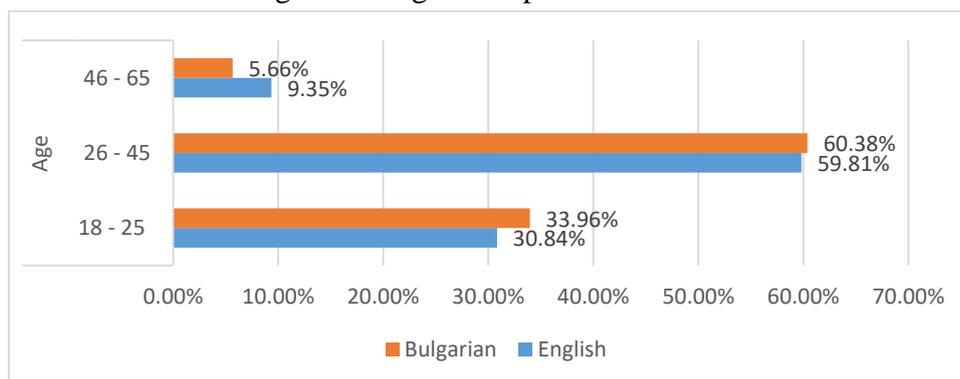


Figure 2 – Age of respondents



We have a balanced representation across gender and strong participation of the 26 – 45 age group from all 213 respondents.

Test on Hypothesis 1 (H1)

H1: There is a significant difference in perceived trust in AI through minimalist branding between different language groups (Bulgarian and English respondents).

To test if there is a significant difference in the variables, a Mann-Whitey U test was conducted. It compared Minimalism_score and TrustAI_score. Those two scores reflects as a combination of all questions from the analysed sections – which are 2 and 3:

-> Minimalism_score = Q2.1+Q2.2+Q2.3+Q2.4+Q2.5+Q2.6

-> TrustAI_score = Q3.1+Q3.2+Q3.3+Q3.4+Q3.5+Q3.6

Table 1 - Mann-Whitney U test for H1

| Mann-Whitney U test | | |
|------------------------|------------------|---------------|
| | Minimalism_score | TrustAI_score |
| Mann-Whitney U | 5668,000 | 5258,000 |
| Wilcoxon W | 11446,000 | 11036,000 |
| Z | -,007 | -,920 |
| Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) | ,995 | ,358 |

Table 2 - Mean scores by language group

| Mean | | | |
|------------------------|------------------|---------------|---------|
| Questionnaire language | Minimalism_score | TrustAI_score | |
| English | Mean | 29,8972 | 30,4673 |
| | N | 107 | 107 |
| | Std. Deviation | 7,70804 | 7,60253 |
| Bulgarian | Mean | 29,8491 | 31,0849 |
| | N | 106 | 106 |
| | Std. Deviation | 8,09679 | 8,19421 |
| Total | Mean | 29,8732 | 30,7746 |
| | N | 213 | 213 |
| | Std. Deviation | 7,88526 | 7,88992 |

The results from the Mann-Whitney U test indicate no statistically significant differences in either “Minimalism_score” (p=0,995) or “TrustAI_score” (p=0,358) between Bulgarian and English respondents (p > 0.05). Therefore, Hypothesis 1 is not supported by empirical analysis.

Test on Hypothesis 2 (H2)

H2: There is a significant positive correlation between perceived minimalism and trust in AI within each language group (Bulgarian and English respondents).

To assess this relationship, Spearman’s rank correlation was used, as the data were not normally distributed – we have N of 107 and N of 106 respondents respectively. H1: there is a significant difference in perceived trust in AI through minimalist branding between different language groups (Bulgarian and English respondents).

Table 3 - Spearman Correlation between “Minimalism_score” and “TrustAI_score” by language group

| Spearman Correlations | | | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|------------------|---------------|
| Questionnaire language | | | Minimalism_score | TrustAI_score |
| English | Minimalism_score | Correlation Coefficient | 1,000 | ,751 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | . | ,000 |
| | | N | 107 | 107 |
| | TrustAI_score | Correlation Coefficient | ,751 | 1,000 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | ,000 | . |
| | | N | 107 | 107 |
| Bulgarian | Minimalism_score | Correlation Coefficient | 1,000 | ,687 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | . | ,000 |
| | | N | 106 | 106 |
| | TrustAI_score | Correlation Coefficient | ,687 | 1,000 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | ,000 | . |
| | | N | 106 | 106 |

We can see that There is a strong and statistically significant positive correlation between perceived minimalism and trust in AI within both the Bulgarian ($\rho = .687, p < .01$) and English ($\rho = .751, p < .01$) respondent groups. The conclusion is that Hypothesis 2 is supported.

Test on Hypothesis 3 (H3)

H3: Higher perception of minimalist branding positively correlates with better understanding and perceived safety of AI products, within both Bulgarian and English respondent groups.

To test this hypothesis, Spearman's correlation was conducted between the computed "Minimalism_score" and two items from Q3: "Q3.4 – AI technologies presented in a simple manner make me feel safer" and "Q3.6 – Minimalist branding helps me understand AI products better."

Table 4 - Spearman Correlation between „Minimalism_score“ and selected trust-related items from Q3

| Spearman Correlations | | | | | |
|------------------------|--|-------------------------|------------------|--|--|
| Questionnaire language | | | Minimalism_score | Q3.4 AI technologies presented in a simple manner make me feel safer | Q3.6. Minimalist branding helps me understand AI products better |
| English | Minimalism_score | Correlation Coefficient | 1,000 | ,609 | ,678 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | . | ,000 | ,000 |
| | | N | 107 | 107 | 107 |
| | Q3.4 AI technologies presented in a simple manner make me feel safer | Correlation Coefficient | ,609 | 1,000 | ,630 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | ,000 | . | ,000 |
| | | N | 107 | 107 | 107 |
| | Q3.6. Minimalist branding helps me understand AI products better | Correlation Coefficient | ,678 | ,630 | 1,000 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | ,000 | ,000 | . |
| | | N | 107 | 107 | 107 |
| Bulgarian | Minimalism_score | Correlation Coefficient | 1,000 | ,534 | ,622 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | . | ,000 | ,000 |
| | | N | 106 | 106 | 106 |
| | Q3.4 AI technologies presented in a simple manner make me feel safer | Correlation Coefficient | ,534 | 1,000 | ,622 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | ,000 | . | ,000 |
| | | N | 106 | 106 | 106 |
| | Q3.6. Minimalist branding helps me understand AI products better | Correlation Coefficient | ,622 | ,622 | 1,000 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | ,000 | ,000 | . |
| | | N | 106 | 106 | 106 |

The results confirm that a higher perception of minimalism is strongly and positively associated with both perceived safety (Q3.4) and understanding (Q3.6) of AI technologies. In the English-speaking group ($N = 107$), the correlation between minimalism and understanding is $\rho = .678$ ($p < .001$), and for safety it is $\rho = .609$ ($p < .001$). Among Bulgarian respondents ($N = 106$), the correlation between minimalism and understanding is $\rho = .622$ ($p < .001$), while for safety it is $\rho = .534$ ($p < .001$). These values show that minimalist branding is more closely linked to the perceived cognitive clarity (understanding) of AI products than to feelings of safety in both groups. In both cases, the results are statistically significant and support Hypothesis 3.

Conclusion and future orientation of the study

The present study investigates the relationship between minimalist branding and consumer trust in AI technologies, focusing on cross-cultural perspectives between Bulgarian and English-speaking participants. The findings provide empirical support for two of the three hypotheses presented. First, Hypothesis 1, which tested for a significant difference in perceptions of trust and minimalism across language groups, was not supported by the study. Despite slight differences in mean scores, no statistically significant variation was observed, suggesting that language or cultural context alone does not significantly modify the relationship between minimalist branding and trust in AI. In contrast to the first, Hypothesis 2 reveals a strong and statistically significant relationship between perceptions of minimalism and trust in AI across both language groups. This reinforces the relevance of minimalist branding as a tool for fostering trust in complex technologies such as artificial intelligence, which may stimulate their use in practice. Similarly, Hypothesis 3 showed that minimalist branding positively contributes to both the understanding and perceived safe use of AI. These findings are particularly relevant in the context of the growing adoption of AI systems and the corresponding need for transparent, intuitive branding strategies.

The theoretical foundation of the study is based on brand theory, design minimalism, and the formation of trust in digital environments. This framework contributes to the growing literature on how branding strategies influence consumer psychology in a technological context, especially in relation to trust, clarity, and emotional response. This study offers valuable insights for branding professionals, UX/UI designers, AI product developers, and communication strategists who seek to increase consumer trust in emerging technologies. It also benefits digital marketing specialists by providing measurable evidence of the effects of branding, even in a cross-cultural context.

Research in the future on the topic could further explore the role of visual identity elements (e.g., logos, color schemes) or the impact of minimalist branding in other digital technologies. Additionally, longitudinal or experimental studies could offer deeper insights into causality and changes in consumer behavior over time.

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