

Exploring Visual Representation of Malaysia Identity as a Medium of Communication in Nation Brand

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ABSTRACT

Visual form on packaging design are (is) primary vehicle for communicating information to consumers including to describe the product image, brand image, country of origin (COO) and nation brand. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to examine consumers' perception on visual representation of Malaysia through visual stimuli. A total of 120 visual stimuli are tested through survey questionnaire across 160 participants. Based on the consumers' point of view, the findings of this study showed that visual from three categories (i.e., personality, nation's icon, landmark) are the highest percentage. This research not only focusing (focuses) on the visual form per se, but the findings from the research eventually will help researchers to explore on visual styles based on stimuli that have been tested.

KEYWORDS: National Identity, Visual Communication, Nation Brand, Visual Stimuli.

INTRODUCTION

The idea that visual communication can be more powerful than verbal communication, suggesting in many instances that people learn and retain information that is presented to them visually (is) much better than verbally [10]. This is because content of any images conveys information [8]. The visual images can be just as effective vehicles for myth as verbal discourse: "the written word, but also the photograph, cinema, reportage, sport, shows, the advertisement-all this can serve as a support for mythical discourse [22]. Hence, visual is a very important part of element in packaging design. It is widely believed that on-packaging images are particularly better motivators than words. This is verified by studies of visual attention during brand choice by [29]. Their study reveals that consumers tend to rely on motivator on visual information afore of verbal information, if they are pressured for time, which is the case of purchases of low-involvement products. Visual elements in packaging can be seen as a 'touch point' information of product image, brand image, brand identity and country of origin (COO). Therefore, researchers wanted to use a visual of national identity that reflects the country as an approach to enhance the identity of local products. Direct communication through packaging has helped consumers make a choice. Almost 48% of point of purchase (PoP) sales are affected by the use of visual in packaging design [27]. Apart from promoting the product in the local and international markets, packaging design can also help to promote the country of origin internationally and determining consumers' choice [6, 14, 28]. The main objective of the research is to identify the degree of visual representation for national identity as a medium of communication in promoting nation brand.

National Identity

National identity can be perceived in multidimensional construct. Having explored the construct of national identity, researchers have looked into sum of all perceptions of a nation in the mind of international stakeholders, which may contain some of the following elements: belief system, psychological, people, place, common myths and historical, culture, language, history, food, fashion, famous faces (celebrities), global brands, etc. [4, 7, 11-12, 23, 25]. From the theoretical viewpoint, according to [25], national identity refers to historic territory or homeland, common myths and historical, memories a common mass public culture, common legal rights and duties for all, members, common economy with territorial mobility for members. If scrutinised in more depth, national identity comprises 'the set of meaning' owned by the given culture through cultural homogeneity, belief structure, national heritage and ethnocentrism [12]. In this paper, Malaysia identity will be addressed specifically with twelve constructs of national identity; flora, fauna, games, handicraft, performing arts, nations' icon, personality, landmark, historic buildings, tourism and topography, festivals and international events, and musical instruments [13].

Many studies have shown a positive impact on product use of national identity in order to promote their products in the market [15, 21-22]. Regarding to [22], Russian mythology and nature continue to be obviously

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displayed and embraced in Russian packaging designs [24]. Forests and animals like wolves, bears and foxes are used frequently and symbolize the romance of the countryside and historic folktales. Visual religious symbols are seen on many products (wine, perfume, chocolate, etc.) and packaging, mostly images such as Moscow's Saint Basil's Cathedral. As well as the use of place and geography [16-17], used historic theme [5] and historic building [26]. In regards to examples of national identity application in several functions, national identity should be incorporated to a greater extent as part of an international image building effort [3].

Visual Communication

The perception of imagery varies from one country to another because visuals have different understanding and represent different things to different people [20]. Each image has specific meanings depending on the culture of the beholder. Images can create visual excitement, memorable experiences and recognizable "touch points". That's why in packaging design "touch point" is a marketing term used refers to the critical visual element that strategically connects the brand to the consumer and becomes what the consumer visually identifies with the product. The appropriate use of visual imagery is the key to the successful communication of a product. When combined with word, images expand the meaning and interpretation of the overall design. For example, the packaging elements comprise two main visual categories; (i) visual and information communication and (ii) visual elements (graphics, colour, size and shape) that play an integral role in product branding and also facilitate consumer identification by communicating meaning and product differentiation. Information communication is one of the core functions of packaging, which assists consumers during decision-making process. It can be concluded that non-verbal signs like pictures, shapes, colours, textures, etc. can be just as meaningful as their verbal counterparts. In other words, they can be "read" just like any other text.

Nation Brand

Today country brand becomes an important issue because all countries have instigated to compete for the attention of the world in terms of investment, tourism, respect, media and to get the attention of other countries. Concept of 'nation brand' covers a very wide area of marketing knowledge includes branding, positioning, cultural influence, country of origin effect and consumer behaviour [19]. Subsequently, in this case, "guru" of the nation-branding movement, in [2] has developed a concept of nation brand index (Figure 1) that exhibits the influence and plea of a nation's brand image which explains how consumers around the world perceive the character and personality of the brand. Nation brand is the entirety of people's perceptions of a country based on six component: tourism, export, governance, investment and immigration, culture and heritage, and people of the country.



Figure 1: The nation brand hexagon [33]

In relation to this research, the researchers have focused on tourism, exports, culture and heritage. In the component of exports, the nation brand image is evaluated according to the perception of country's origin (COO) effect through products and services offered by the country. In addition, it contemplates the creative energy of the country, and its contribution to the areas of science and technology [30]. Culture and heritage measures the nation image in the areas of cultural patrimony and legacies. This dimension also measures aspects of contemporary culture such as music, films and literature [31]. Lastly, it evaluates the nation's presence and excellence in the area of sports. The dimension of tourism is evaluated based on three major areas: natural beauty, historic buildings and monuments, city life and urban attractions [32]. In addition to these evaluations, this dimension measures an individual's willingness to visit the nation and how they would rate their experience in the country.

In addition to nation brand image, creating a particular personality for a brand is well recognized as a marketing strategy to affect such a differentiation and create a strong brand image and ultimately higher brand preference and greater brand loyalty [18]. In [1] defines brand personality as "a set of human characteristics

associated with a brand”. A framework of personalities within the domain of brands identifies five primary dimensions: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness (Figure 2). Brand personality is important because it systematically captures and categorizes facets of brands in terms of generalizable symbolic benefits.

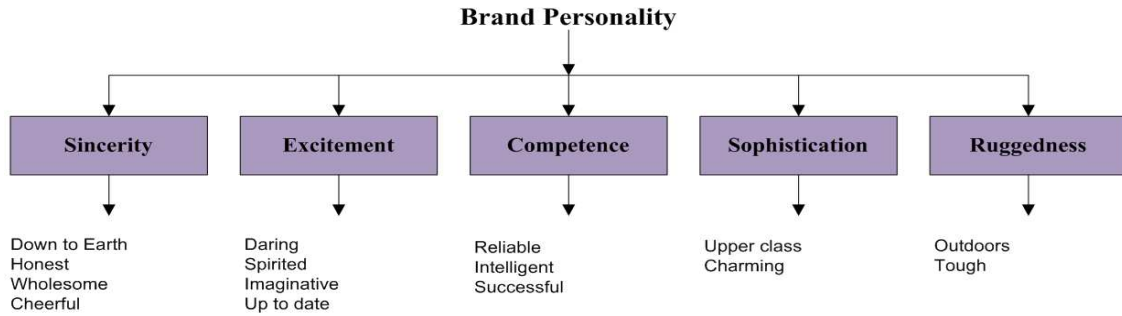


Figure 2: Dimension of brand personality [1]

METHODOLOGY

A set of questionnaire was developed and divided into two parts: demographic and 12 category of visual stimuli. Figure 3 shows twelve visual stimuli categories used in the study. The total of visual stimuli are 120 visuals (Figure 4) that represent identity of Malaysia and measured by approval of five-point Likert Scale from “strongly disagree” (ranging 1) to “strongly agree” (ranging 5). IBM Statistical Software for Social Science (SPSS) was employed. Descriptive statistics i.e. frequencies and percentages were used to calculate the items.



Figure 3: Twelve categories of visual stimuli



Figure 4: Sample of visual stimuli

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A questionnaire was administered to 160 respondents which details the respondent's gender, age and field of study. Table 1 provides a summary of the participants' gender, age and field of study which involved 160 male 50% (n=80) and female respondents 50% (n=80) on 130 items. In this study, 31.9% (n=51) aged between 18 to 20 years old, 56.3% (n=90) between 21 to 23 years old, 11.3% (n=18) between 24 to 26 years old and 0.6% (n=1) were over 27 years old. The respondents' field of studies are Art and Design (50%), Engineering (20.6%), Education (18.1%), Commerce (0.6%) and others (10.6%).

Table 1: Profile of respondents

Demographic Characteristic								
Gender	Frequency	Percentage	Age	Frequency	Percentage	Field of Study	Frequency	Percentage
Male	80	50	18-20 years	51	31.9	Commerce	1	0.6
Female	80	50	21-23 years	90	56.3	Engineering	33	20.6
			24-26 years	18	11.3	Art and Design	80	50.0
			Above 27 years old	1	0.6	Education	29	18.1
			Other	17	10.6			

The next stage of the analysis tested for differences in visual perceptions. According to the results, Table 2 summarizes the mean and percentages for the respondent perceptions with respect to category of visual. Result has shown that the top three highest score were Historical Building (88%) with (M=4.40). This shows that although the construction of new structures and buildings, historical buildings can still be well-known. Hence, this leads to the strong demand for consistent and persistent conservation in preserving and maintaining the historical values in the country to ensure it will not threaten the place identity [9]. This study established the importance of visitors' imageability and place identity to be considered in enhancing the new or future development of any historical city. This can make the city more meaningful and memorable for visitors. Then, followed by Nations' Icon score (M=4.35) and Games (M=4.28). Nations' Icon is not simply a symbol, but as a means which a country portrays itself to the rest of the world. The flags and the colours, for example are made into National Icons for each country around the world and represent nations at global events. Flags also can be portraits of a country's historical past and pride of its people. The Personality (M=3.67) and Flora (M =3.58) categories were the lowest score in the test (Table 2).

Table 2: Descriptive statistics for twelve category of visual stimuli

Category of Visual Stimuli	Mean	Percentage
Historical Building	4.40	88
Nations' Icon	4.35	87
Games	4.28	86
Tourism and Topography	4.26	85
Festivals and International Events	4.15	83
Handicraft	4.13	83
Musical Instruments	4.08	82
Performing Arts	3.93	79
Landmark	3.82	77
Personality	3.67	73
Flora	3.58	72
Fauna	3.48	70

Figure 5 and 6 present the percentages for the respondents' perceptions of ten visual from one of visual category (Landmark, Performing Arts) that was tested. Based from the result, the researchers then observed the three highest scores for each visual stimuli category. Table 3 provides the descriptive analysis, for instance, the highest score for Flora category are Hibiscus (M=4.80), Refflesia (M=4.39) and Bougainvillea (M=3.61). Meanwhile, in Fauna category showed that Hornbill (M=4.29), Tiger (M=4.26) and Leatherback Turtle (M=4.07) as the highest scores.

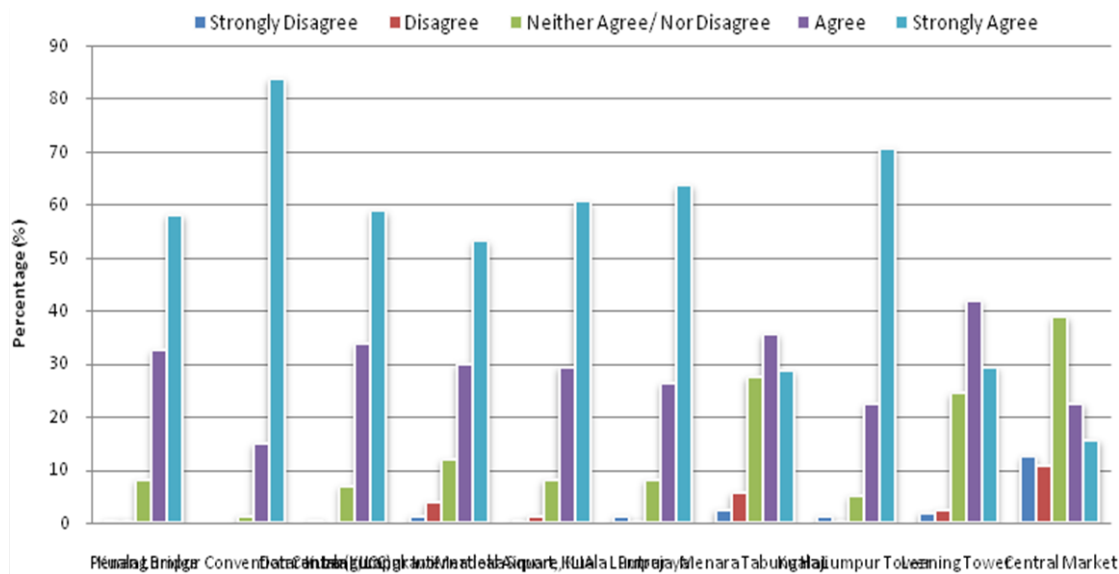


Figure 5: Results for landmark category

Table 3: Descriptive statistics for ‘strongly agree’ scale

Category	Mean	Std. Dev.	Category	Mean	Std. Dev.
Flora			Handicraft		
Hibiscus	4.80	0.46	Keris	4.60	0.64
Rafflesia	4.39	0.97	Batik	4.59	0.61
Bougainvillea	3.61	1.02	Songket	4.46	0.79
Fauna			Historical Buildings		
Hornbill	4.29	0.89	A Famosa	4.59	0.70
Tiger	4.26	0.88	Sultan Abdul Samad Building	4.45	0.75
Leatherback Turtle	4.07	0.93	Kuala Lumpur Railway Station	4.28	0.85
Games			Performing Arts		
Wau	4.79	0.48	Zapin Dance	4.53	0.72
Congkak	4.65	0.57	Dikir Barat	4.47	0.78
Gasing	4.54	0.63	Ghazal	4.26	0.81
Landmark			Festival and International Event		
Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre (KLCC)	4.83	0.41	World Kite Festival	4.53	0.70
Kuala Lumpur Tower	4.61	0.72	Le Tour de Langkawi	4.49	0.72
Putrajaya	4.51	0.77	Formula 1 Petronas Malaysia Grandprix	4.38	0.82
Personality			Musical Instruments		
Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad	4.84	0.52	Kompang	4.70	0.58
Tan Sri P. Ramlee	4.71	0.63	Gong	4.46	0.69
Datuk Nicol Ann David	4.67	0.61	Gambus	4.36	0.73
Nations' Icon			Travel and Topography		
Flag	4.90	0.42	Mount of Kinabalu	4.77	0.49
Coat of Arms of the Country	4.83	.39	Cameron Highlands	4.55	.69
National Monument	4.66	.61	Redang Island	4.53	.76

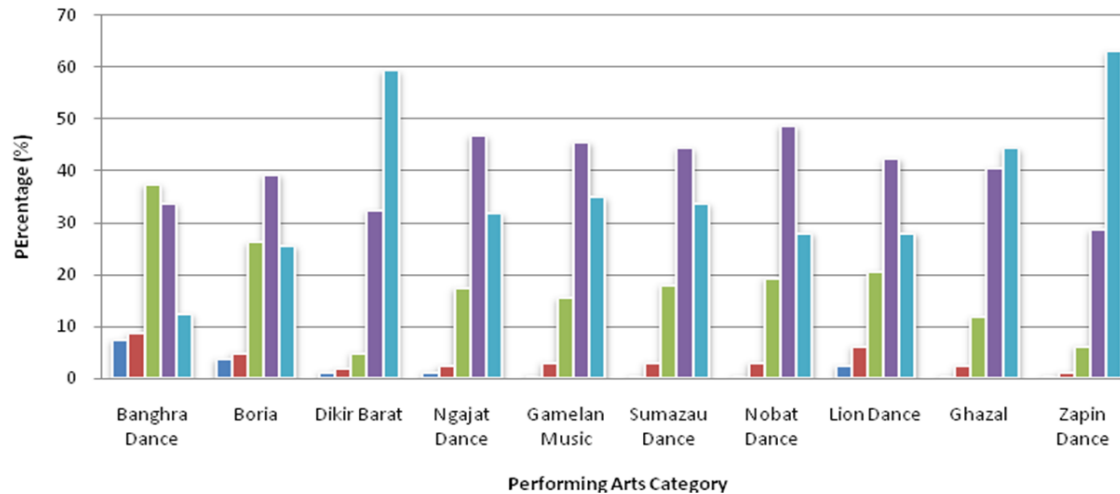


Figure 6: Results for performing arts category

CONCLUSION

This research was developed in order to choose the highest score from the twelve visual stimuli for Malaysia national identity. As a result, out of 130 items, only 36 items will be selected for application in future research. Furthermore, the future research may expand on the current findings by investigating consumers' perception on visual styles such as photography, icon and symbol, painting, doodle and other illustration that using different mediums and techniques.

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