

The Impact of Graphic Design and Local Language (Slang) in Strengthening Local Identity: A Case Study of the APOM Malaysia Brand

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Abstract: *Graphic design serves as a powerful tool in shaping cultural identity by integrating visual elements that reflect a community's heritage and linguistic expressions. This study examines the role of design language in reinforcing local identity through the incorporation of Malaysian slang into graphic design, focusing on APOM Malaysia's merchandise. Using qualitative research methods, including observational analysis and visual content evaluation, this study explores how typography, colour schemes, and layout principles contribute to national branding. The results show that the design of graphic tees using linguistic identity leads to increased brand appreciation and unity among Malaysians, showcasing their cultural identity. This study supports the idea of preserving culture through the work of graphic designers while also showing the impact of the creative economy on social integration, which will be useful for designers and marketers aiming to promote locality through visual materials.*

Keywords: Graphic Design, Local Identity, Cultural Representation, Branding, Language

1. Introduction

Graphic design functions as an essential medium of communication, combining artistic expression, informational clarity, and economic influence (Rawat et al., 2021). It serves as a bridge between creators and audiences, allowing ideas, emotions, and cultural values to be conveyed through visual elements. In the modern era, the field of graphic design has evolved significantly, influenced by technological advancements and digital media proliferation. Today, it is widely applied across various industries, including advertising, branding, and public information dissemination. With its ability to shape narratives, graphic design plays a critical role in preserving cultural heritage and fostering national identity. However, research exploring how design language can integrate linguistic elements, such as local slang, to reinforce cultural identity remains limited.

The use of language in graphic design extends beyond textual content; it is embedded in typographic choices, visual hierarchies, and symbolic imagery. In Malaysia, where a rich linguistic landscape exists due to its multicultural society, the integration of local slang in design presents an opportunity to create deeper cultural connections with the audience. APOM Malaysia, a local merchandise brand, effectively incorporates Malaysian slang into its visual identity, leveraging colloquial expressions to resonate with local consumers. This approach not

only strengthens brand recognition but also reinforces a shared sense of identity within the community. Through the strategic use of color, typography, and layout, APOM Malaysia transforms language into a visual asset that promotes national pride and cultural continuity.

This study explores the intersection of graphic design and language in the context of local identity formation. By analyzing APOM Malaysia's design strategy, the study investigates how visual elements contribute to branding, consumer engagement, and cultural representation. Additionally, it examines the effectiveness of incorporating local slang into graphic design as a means of fostering emotional connections with the audience. The study aims to fill the research gap by providing insights into how graphic design can function as a tool for cultural preservation while adapting to contemporary design trends. The findings will be beneficial for designers, marketers, and cultural practitioners seeking to utilize visual communication as a medium for celebrating and sustaining Malaysian identity.

2. Literature Review

Graphic design has evolved significantly in the digital era, expanding its applications across industries such as advertising, branding, and public information dissemination. Beyond aesthetics, it is a powerful tool for storytelling and cultural preservation. The importance of visual identity in maintaining cultural heritage is attached to design features such as typography, colour, and images which UNESCO (2023) argues contributes to authentic representation. These components ensure the protection of cultural heritage in modern communication. Customer and cultural value support economic development through cultural and creative industries as put forward by The World Bank (2023). Branding that incorporates cultural and linguistic features cultivate trust among consumers and increase familiarity, thus, enhancing relatability to the local audience.

The integration of graphic design and local language (slang) plays a significant role in strengthening local identity, particularly in branding and consumer engagement. Language is a cornerstone of cultural identity, serving as a unifying force and a representation of national heritage (Hoogervorst, 2015). In Malaysia, Malay functions as the official language, embodying the nation's traditions and values. The incorporation of local slang into branding and design enhances cultural familiarity, fostering deeper emotional connections between brands and consumers. Studies indicate that linguistic elements in marketing strategies contribute to stronger consumer attachment, reinforcing a sense of belonging within local communities (Ridwan, Fauzi, & Shahizan, 2021).

Slang tends to be more common among younger generations, and its branding is a true example of society's changing culture, language, and identity (Zulkifli & Mahadi, 2020, as cited in Sabri et al. 2020; Mohamed & Syafreza, 2022). Language is more than words; it can also be portrayed through a particular font, imagery, and even the layout (Lin & Kamrozzaman, 2024). The adoption of vernacular language in branding is known to stimulate local participation and foster appreciation of culture. It deeply affects one's mental development, educational attainment, and social economic status. The success achieved by APOM Malaysia in incorporating Malaysian slang in the design of their products demonstrates the capacity of language to function as a visual pride of identity while nurturing nationalism.

Companies leveraging slang in branding establish an informal and relatable brand identity, fostering consumer engagement and loyalty. In the Malaysian context, APOM Malaysia has successfully infused everyday expressions into visually appealing merchandise that highlights

national pride and humor. Through its designs, APOM Malaysia strengthens cultural relevance and appeals to both locals and tourists by embedding familiar linguistic expressions in its branding.

Graphic design, as a form of visual communication, is instrumental in preserving and promoting cultural identity. Design elements, such as colors, typography, symbols, and composition, contribute significantly to cultural storytelling (Aleshawie, 2019). Traditional Malaysian motifs, including batik and songket patterns, have been adapted into modern branding strategies, ensuring the preservation of cultural aesthetics while maintaining contemporary appeal. APOM Malaysia effectively employs typography, color schemes, and layout structures to amplify the impact of local slang in its branding. The use of bold fonts and vibrant colors in its merchandise enhances the visibility of slang phrases, making them stand out as cultural statements. Additionally, the incorporation of playful and witty designs adds an element of humor, strengthening consumer engagement.

The combination of language and graphic design fosters a unique brand identity that resonates with Malaysian consumers. By integrating local slang in branding, APOM Malaysia enhances brand recognition while reinforcing national identity. This approach highlights how visual communication can preserve and celebrate linguistic diversity while maintaining commercial appeal. The integration of local slang in branding is more than just a marketing trend; it is a strategic approach that builds cultural authenticity and emotional appeal. Studies suggest that cultural familiarity increases consumer trust and brand loyalty, as audiences feel a stronger affinity towards brands that reflect their identity (Lubis, 2019).

Furthermore, incorporating slang into design strengthens cultural storytelling, allowing brands to communicate narratives that align with societal values and humor. APOM Malaysia's success highlights the effectiveness of blending graphic design with local language to create a brand that embodies Malaysian culture while remaining relevant to modern consumers. As branding continues to evolve, the synergy between visual storytelling and linguistic representation will remain a key factor in establishing a strong and authentic local identity. This literature review establishes the theoretical framework for understanding how graphic design and language function as complementary elements in branding, particularly within the Malaysian context. Through the case of APOM Malaysia, it becomes evident that cultural representation through design and language is essential for strengthening local identity and fostering consumer engagement.

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach, focusing on observational research and visual analysis to assess APOM Malaysia's design strategies. The qualitative nature of this research allows for an in-depth exploration of how design elements contribute to cultural branding and consumer engagement. By utilizing this approach, the study aims to uncover the ways in which typography, colour palettes, and layout structures influence brand identity and local representation.

Data collection for this research is conducted through two primary methods: visual analysis and observational study. The visual analysis involves a detailed examination of APOM Malaysia's T-shirt designs, focusing on the integration of local slang, typography, colour choices, and design composition. This method helps to determine how visual elements reinforce cultural narratives and enhance brand recognition. Additionally, an observational

study is conducted to analyse consumer interactions with APOM Malaysia's merchandise. By observing consumer engagement, this study assesses the effectiveness of slang-based designs in attracting and resonating with target audiences. The observational study provides valuable insights into how consumers perceive, react to, and interact with the brand's visual identity in real-world settings.







Through the combination of these qualitative research methods, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of graphic design and local language in strengthening Malaysian identity through branding and consumer engagement.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of a study focused on identifying the design language used by the local brand, APOM Malaysia. It highlights the design elements incorporated in the brand's t-shirt designs and explores how graphic design language contributes to promoting local identity in Malaysia.

4.1 Design language used by APOM Malaysia

Table 1: Design language used by APOM Malaysia

Merchandise (T-Shirt)	Design Language								Local Identity		Description
	Colour Schemes	Typography			Layout				Visual	Language (Slang)	
		Serif	Sans Serif	Decorative	Contrast	Alignment	White Space	Hierchy			
Figure 1 			✓		✓		✓	✓		Cun	The Most <i>Cun</i> Amoi in Malaysia. Cun: Gorgeous
Figure 2 			✓		✓		✓	✓		Terrer	The Most <i>Terrer</i> Mom in Malaysia Terer: Great
Figure 3 			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Makcik Bawang	Makcik Bawang @ Membawang: A group of aunts that swearing or love saying things which not good about others.

<p>Figure 4</p> 			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		<p>Pokai</p> <p>I just bought PS4, <i>pokai</i> already</p> <p>Pokai: No money</p>
<p>Figure 5</p> 				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		<p>Tapau</p> <p>Cha <i>Tapau</i> The Ais Satu!</p> <p>Tapau: Wrap, Buy</p>
<p>Figure 6</p> 			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	<p>Rem-pit</p> <p>Little Miss Rempit</p> <p>Rempit: Motorcycles activities in group for illegal racing activities or doing dangerous stunts.</p>



Figure 7 			√		√		√			Buaya	<i>Buaya</i> Danger Buaya: A man who likes to change his female partner
Figure 8 			√		√	√	√	√		Chup	<i>Chup!</i> Don't eat first, let me insta Chup: Pause
Figure 9 			√		√	√	√	√		Slumber	The Most <i>Slumber</i> Uncle in Malaysia Slumber: Laid-back or not serious
Figure 10 				√	√		√		√	Sap Sap Sui	"Bro...late already sure can make it ah?" <i>Sap Sap Sui</i> Sap Sap Sui: Easy
Figure 11 			√		√	√	√	√		Paloi	Sabah and Sarawak is part of Malaysia lah <i>Paloi</i> Paloi: Stupid

Figure 1 showcases a t-shirt that features pink and yellow colours, a sans-serif typeface, and a contrast-type layout, incorporating white space and hierarchy. The first design utilizes the Cun slang in the phrase "The Most Cun Amoi in Malaysia", which translates to "The Most Gorgeous Lady in Malaysia." In Malay, Cun is categorized as gender-related slang. According to Aminnudin Saimon (2015), social aspects are the primary area of study in identifying gender-related lexis within slang language. Other gender-associated slang terms include 'awek,' 'cun,' 'balak,' and 'pak we.' Alwasilah (1985), as recorded by Aminnudin (2015), states that slang contributes to language development by introducing new words and enriching vocabulary. This evolution keeps the Malay language relevant and adaptable to societal changes, particularly in lexical development.

Similarly, Diagram 2 illustrates a t-shirt design that incorporates a pink and white colour scheme, a sans-serif typeface, and a contrast-type layout with white space and hierarchy. This design features the Terer slang with the phrase "The Most Terer Mom in Malaysia", meaning "The Greatest Mom in Malaysia." According to Naihah et al. (2016), slang words derived from foreign languages are often adapted into Malay, either retaining or altering their original meaning. An example is the slang "Terer," which originates from English and has been phonetically adapted into Malay.

Figure 3 displays a t-shirt featuring black, white, yellow, orange, blue, and liquid orange colors, using a sans-serif and decorative typeface. The layout incorporates contrast, alignment, and white space. This design includes a visual representation of the slang "Mak Cik Bawang," referring to a group of gossipy women who frequently criticize others. Nashatul et al. (2022) explain that the term "membawang," derived from "bawang" (onions), has gained popularity on social media and is now widely used in virtual communication. As Haroon (2021), cited in Nashatul et al. (2022), notes, "membawang" has replaced the traditional term "mulut puaka," which describes someone who frequently gossips and criticizes others.

The fourth design employs black and yellow colors, a sans-serif typeface, and a layout featuring contrast, alignment, white space, and hierarchy. This t-shirt incorporates the Pokai slang in the phrase "I just bought a PS4, pokai already," meaning "I have no money left." According to Hoogervorst (2015), the term "Puk1 gaai1 (仆街)," which means "falling on the street," is a Cantonese slang phrase that has influenced Malay youth language. Many of these loanwords, originally associated with crime, were initially confined to criminal slang before being adopted into mainstream youth vocabulary.

The fifth design utilizes black, white, and gold colors, along with a decorative typeface. The layout follows contrast, alignment, white space, and hierarchy principles. The slang term Tapau is used in the phrase "Cha Tapau Teh Ais Satu!", meaning "Wrap up one iced tea!" The term 'Tapau' originates from the Chinese phrase 打包 (da bao), which translates to "take away" or "to-go." It is commonly used to refer to packaging food for takeaway orders. Similarly, the Malay term 'Bungkus' serves the same function (Time Out Kuala Lumpur, 2015).

The sixth design features white, black, blue, yellow, grey, orange, and liquid orange colours, a sans-serif and decorative typeface, and a contrast, alignment, and white space layout. The slang Rempit appears in the phrase "Little Miss Rempit," referring to illegal racing and dangerous stunts. Fuad & Fauzi (2020) explain that the term "Mat Rempit" is derived from 'Mat' (a common Malay male nickname), 'remp' (referring to twisting the throttle), and 'it' (indicating the throttle mechanism). Although "Mat Rempit" is not found in the Malay dictionary,

Malaysian mass media have popularized it to raise awareness of youth involvement in illegal motorcycle racing (Ismail & Borhanuddin, 2015, as cited in Fuad & Fauzi, 2020).

The seventh design features red and white colors, a sans-serif typeface, and a contrast-type layout with white space. The slang Buaya is used in the phrase "Buaya Danger," describing a man known for frequently changing partners. According to Merry & Arbak (2022), the term "Buaya Darat" metaphorically represents a deceitful or promiscuous man, although it does not correlate with actual crocodile behavior. In Malay and Indonesian cultures, "land crocodile" (Buaya Darat) signifies a man who frequently engages with multiple women and abandons them afterward.

The eighth design features blue and white colours, a sans-serif typeface, and a layout with contrast, alignment, white space, and hierarchy. The slang term Chup is used in the phrase "Chup! Don't eat first, let me Insta!", meaning "Wait! Let me take a photo for Instagram first."

Figure 9 showcases a green and white t-shirt with a sans-serif typeface and a contrast, alignment, white space, and hierarchy layout. The slang Slumber is featured in "The Most Slumber Uncle in Malaysia," meaning laid-back or not serious. According to Hoogervorst (2015), the Malay slang 'selamber', derived from English 'slumber,' conveys a relaxed or carefree attitude. Southern Malay dialects often drop the word-final /r/ in pronunciation.

The tenth design incorporates red, white, and blue colours, a decorative typeface, and a contrast-type layout with white space. The slang Sap Sap Sui appears in the phrase "Bro... late already... sure can make it ah? Sap Sap Sui", which translates to "No worries, it's easy!"

Finally, Figure 11 displays a black and yellow t-shirt using a sans-serif typeface with a contrast, alignment, white space, and hierarchy layout. The slang Paloi is used in the phrase "Sabah and Sarawak are part of Malaysia lah, Paloi," meaning "stupid." The Palui lexical, frequently used among DMS (Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Malay Standard) speakers, varies in interpretation based on context. Culturally, "palui" signifies "stupid," as defined in the Brunei Malay Dictionary (2007) and Kamus Dewan (2015) (Brunei Br) (Saidatul, 2021).

4.2 The role of design language in enhancing local identity

The colour scheme of a graphic design plays a crucial role in the observation process, as thoughtful colour coordination serves as an initial attention-grabber for the audience (Lu, 2022). APOM Malaysia primarily uses basic or primary colours in their t-shirt designs, followed by secondary and tertiary colours. The combination and selection of colours in APOM Malaysia's t-shirt designs are harmonious and vibrant, enhancing brand identity and distinguishing them from competitors (Sagar, 2018). Choosing the right colours is essential for effectively conveying the intended message and ensuring the brand's future success (Korovesi, 2023). Colour matching is particularly important, as it emphasizes the essence of a graphic design project. When viewers encounter graphic designs, their initial focus is often on the colours used, making thoughtful colour coordination an effective strategy for capturing attention.

Typography involves the artful arrangement of letters and text to enhance readability and visual appeal (Rawat et al., 2021). Typography in APOM Malaysia's t-shirt designs predominantly features a sans-serif typeface, which is known for its clean and modern look. The choice of typography in a design significantly affects the legibility and memorability of its message. Sans-serif typefaces are easier to read, reducing the cognitive effort required to process

information (Karen et al., 2018). Unlike serif typefaces, which can appear dense due to tight line spacing and hyphenation, sans-serif fonts provide a clearer and more accessible reading experience. Among the t-shirt designs, only four incorporate a decorative typeface, while none use a serif typeface.

Additionally, several layout techniques are employed in APOM Malaysia's t-shirt designs, including contrast, alignment, white space, and hierarchy. All t-shirt designs utilize a contrast-based layout with white space, which helps highlight key text and enhance the overall presentation. Alignment and hierarchy are also carefully considered to ensure neatness and readability in the text arrangement. Graphic design layout involves structuring visual elements on a canvas to present information in a logical and cohesive manner (Yuxi et al., 2021).

Furthermore, to add uniqueness and visual appeal to their t-shirt designs, APOM Malaysia incorporates visual elements in some of their designs. Graphic design techniques such as painting, cartooning, and exaggerated deformation are used to enhance the expressiveness of patterns (Lu, 2022). Additionally, the use of slang words on t-shirt designs serves both an informative and decorative purpose, offering users and viewers insights into local language and culture. Text descriptions in graphic design play a crucial role in conveying key messages while also contributing to the aesthetic appeal (Lu, 2022).

Therefore, all elements of design language play a significant role in promoting local identity. By combining colour, typography, layout, visuals, and language, APOM Malaysia successfully creates t-shirt designs that reinforce local branding and cultural representation.

5. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is evident that APOM Malaysia has effectively utilized design language in its t-shirt designs to showcase Malaysia's identity, incorporating local slang expressions. Through the careful selection of vibrant colour palettes, diverse typography—including sans-serif and decorative fonts—as well as thoughtful layout considerations such as contrast, alignment, white space, and hierarchy, APOM Malaysia has successfully created visually compelling designs. Additionally, the integration of Malay language slang enhances the authentic representation of local culture, effectively promoting Malaysia's identity to both locals and tourists.

For future research, it is recommended that scholars explore various local brands specializing in merchandise design infused with elements of national identity, such as language, culture, colour schemes, and architectural motifs. Employing qualitative methods, such as interviews with graphic designers, brand proprietors, and academic experts in graphic design, would provide valuable insights into perceptions and perspectives on locally themed merchandise design.

Additionally, researchers could expand the scope of this study by investigating different aspects of brand language and identity within the context of local merchandise production. Incorporating quantitative research methods would allow for more precise and data-driven feedback from respondents, offering deeper insights into consumer perceptions of locally inspired merchandise design.

Moreover, future studies could explore the role of language in merchandise branding by examining elements such as proverbs, idioms, parables, dialects, taboo words, market slang,

and other informal expressions across various types of merchandise. Such research would contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the impact and significance of local merchandise design in fostering cultural appreciation and national pride.

In conclusion, the potential for impactful and meaningful design is vast, and harnessing the power of design language is crucial. Design that carries intrinsic meaning not only enhances user experience but also plays a pivotal role in preserving, enriching, and promoting cultural heritage. By integrating elements of national identity into merchandise design, brands can contribute to strengthening cultural pride and fostering a deeper appreciation of local heritage.

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