

VISUAL RHETORIC IN MULTICULTURAL PRODUCT ADVERTISEMENT: THE ROLE OF SEMIOTIC MEDIATION

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Abstract: *Multicultural interactions have the power to unite people from diverse cultural backgrounds and play a significant role in shaping the community in their mutual understanding to achieve social cohesion. Product advertisement plays a significant role in adding value to products by spreading brand awareness, inspiring a shared national spirit among Malaysians and promoting a cohesive national identity defined by the nation. The integration of creative multicultural expressions in product advertisement enables the ensemble of positive cultural values to consumers. People of different cultures appreciate a particular cultural design's value in various reasons. The most important characteristic of the visual design is the relationship between cultural understanding and the design characteristics. Semiotic mediation plays a vital role in visual analysis and interpretation by effectively structuring meaning through the powerful of cultural codes, symbols and rhetoric strategies. A preliminary visual interpretation has been conducted in the Ajinomoto advertisement (1985). Starting in 1985, we can see the elements of solidarity value been implement in food product advertisement design. Unfortunately, very limited cultural expression design had been implemented in food advertisement in 1985. This study demonstrates the connection between visual and verbal elements in Ajinomoto's advertisement (1985). Various elements of visual rhetoric have been examined through semiotic mediation, revealing the profound impact and significance of interpretation. Understanding visual rhetoric elements is fundamental to vividly expressing the cultural significance and design implementation. Semiotic mediation play a crucial role in enhancing the representation of national identity. It helps to promote a balanced cultural sensitivity among various ethnic group and build effective social cohesion. National identity deliver an inclusive representation of Malaysia. The research presents a conceptual framework developed through an intensive literature review and visual analysis to effectively identify research gaps. The visual analysis powerfully represents Malaysian culture within the context of food product advertisements.*

Keywords: *Multicultural expression, Visual Expression Value, Visual Rhetoric, Semiotic, Product Advertisement*

Introduction

In the vibrant beautiful Malaysia society, 3 principal ethnic group emerge the indigenous community. It known as Bumiputera (literally, "sons of the soil") constituting 50 percent of the population, alongside the Malay and various non Malay populations. It including the Chinese (37 percent) and Indian (11 percent) communities. Each of these groups significantly contributes to the national cultural diversity, social dynamics and historical development. Understanding the roles and interactions of this ethnic group is a crucial for comprehensively analyzing Malaysia's society structure and promoting social cohesion in multicultural design. Malaysia is a country composed of various ethnicities exemplifying the concept of "one state with several nations." Embracing this diversity helps to create a strong and vibrant society through design implementation perspective. In contrast to ethnic differences, national identity in Malaysia is yet to be fully developed as a multi-cultural country. (Shamsul A. B. et al., 2011). Although Malaysians have embraced diversity from generation, there remain a significant opportunity for understanding the rich culture, custom and belief of ethnicities. Unleashing the understanding can inspire unity and appreciation in our vibrant society. Cultural factors seem to play a significant role in creating identity (Epstein, 1978). Visual rhetoric acts as a visual communication medium to promote culture. Understanding the nature of signs, symbols, and meaning using semiotics can help in understanding visual language and communication (F de Saussure, 1974). Moreover, utilizing semiotic theory allows designers to symmetrically analyse the way in which visual rhetoric shape the interpretation and meaning in design communication. The relationship between visual rhetoric and semiotic theory established a basic foundation framework for designers to engage critically in understanding cultural symbols and signs. This exploration guides designers in producing an impactful design across diverse ethnicities in Malaysia's society. Designers utilize semiotic theory to create persuasive visual messages, making their designs more effective in conveying meaning (Alim et al., 2021). Therefore, the involvement of government and non-government organization is crucial in fostering an understanding of Malaysia's multifaceted diversity through a design perspective. Packaging design serves as an important tool for promoting national harmony and public happiness. By skilfully blending visually compelling elements, culture symbols and practical usability packaging transform everyday products into inspiring visual representations and foster a sense of national identity. The composition, framing, and interpretation of visuals are significantly shaped by cultural norms and societal values (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996). On the other hand, their argument delves into the cultural significance of visual codes, stating that culture acts as a lens through which signs are interpreted and understood. Semiotic play a crucial role in shaping the meaning and understanding visual messages. Together, visual rhetoric and semiotic have significantly influenced the culture narrative and enhance consumer engagement with visual communication. On the other hand, semiotic mediation play a crucial role as an interpretive bridge that connect design used in advertisement to deliver various cultural meanings. It ensures the symbols representation help to foster inclusivity of Malaysia's identity. Ajinomoto (Malaysia) Berhad started its business operations in 1961 as a company that produces monosodium glutamate (MSG), stock seasoning, sweetener, ready mix seasoning, and industrial seasoning. Ajinomoto (Malaysia) Berhad has established itself as a leading food manufacturer, winning the heart and trust of Malaysians for generations. As one of the pioneering Japanese company in Malaysia, Ajinomoto has made a significant impact on the local food industry, demonstrating a commitment to quality and innovation evolving landscape

of Malaysian cuisine. The Ajinomoto Umami seasoning product has become an essential ingredient that has become a must have kitchen item in many Malaysian households. Today, Ajinomoto is sold in more than 100 countries. Ajinomoto Group's 15 factories worldwide supply about one-third of the 1.5 million-ton global markets for monosodium glutamate products.

Literature Review

Multi-cultural value in food product advertisement: Understanding racialization and ethnicization

Embracing the concept of racialization and ethnicity is crucial in Malaysia. As it empowers to create meaningful multicultural narratives in visual expression. By identifying emerging trends, challenges and opportunities related to ethnicity, design can effectively tackle the prevailing issues of tension, conflict and discrimination problem. The understanding can significantly strengthen social cohesion and foster a more inclusive and harmonious society. Shamsul A.B (2020) explores the historical development of ethnicity in Malaysia, including the colonial legacy, migration patterns, and the formation of ethnic identities. He perceived ethnicity embodies a rich and compelling sense of identity, bringing people together through shared heritage, culture and traditions of individuals who have common ancestry. The concept transcends the limitation of race, highlighting the indicated complexities of human experience. By focusing on elements such as language, customs and social practices, ethnicity reveals the dynamic aspects of ethnic identity that inspire a deep sense of belonging as Malaysians. According to him, ethnic identity is self-defined and can vary in importance and prominence among Malaysians within the same ethnic groups (Malays, Chinese, Indians) and native communities. Race and ethnicity play a significant role in highlighting differences within societies. In Malaysia, the complexity of ethnic relations and challenges are vital to addressing in the nation-building objectives. A comprehensive understanding of all ethnicities issues are important for building social cohesion and improving policy making for the social integration. During the Malayan union era period in 1964 to 1948, Malaya face significant challenges related to inter-ethnic conflicts. These conflicts emerge from a complex interplay of social, political and economic factors. It highlights the diverse aspirations and shaped Malaysia's ongoing effort towards unity and social cohesion as multi-ethnic society. Additionally, the central issue revolved around achieving a balance of power between different ethnic groups (Jayum, 2020). The former are related based on blood, biological, and the latter, on socio-cultural differences. Racialization involved color, the white, black, and Mongoloid races. However, ethnic groups are within the same race, but they are differentiated by social-cultural traits and not biological or blood. To foster unity and tolerance among the youth in Malaysia, courses on ethnic relations have been made compulsory in both public and private universities (Jawan et al., 2006). In the context of cultural communication and promotion, packaging design function is more than showing the aesthetic appeal of products. It played a critical role in conveying a product's significance, values and messages. The integration of visual elements into packaging design can extract cultural characteristics through visual expression. The combination of packaging and cultural characteristics ultimately creates a truly impactful and memorable visual experience for consumers (Zhou et al., 2016). Nevertheless, limited literature is available on investigating and interpreting the different dimensions of the cultural values in food product advertisement during 1985. However, a preliminary observation conducted by the researcher indicates that the elements of visual rhetoric existed in Ajinomoto's product advertisement (1985). For example, visual and verbal elements have yet to adequately integrate the cultural values of Ajinomoto brand advertisement (1985). There has been minimal

discussion about cultural concerns in the design practice context of overall advertisement (Lee et al., 2016).

The Relationship Between Visual Rhetoric Elements and Semiotic in Product Advertisement

The effective application of visual rhetoric elements and principles in food product advertisements vividly showcase the cultural value. It is essential to highlight the significance of local cultural values in order to enhance overall cultural appreciation through visual representation. The utilization of visual rhetoric in food product advertisement significantly enhances consumer understanding of the products. It allows the consumer to recognize both the functionality benefit and cultural significance. An excellent visual expression can solve space constraints and make the product's packaging more attractive and informative. Nevertheless, the exploration of visual rhetoric is often associated with semiotic. It helps the understanding of visual communication and its significant impact on the interpretation within various contexts and scenarios. The elements of visual rhetoric are remarkably similar in terms of their choices of optical elements, such as graphic imagery and typography. It is used as an essential tool for immediate and long-lasting visual communication. Additionally, it also delves into the cultural significance of interpret and understand visual codes using semiotic. Also, semiotic constitutes the foundation of understanding visual communication, examining the intricate relationships between signs and their meanings. It focuses on visual signs, codes, cultural value and social significance. The visual signs are not standalone entities but are deeply embedded within cultural and social contexts (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). The research exploration revealed how meaning are interpret, transform and communicate in product advertisement. Ferdinand de Saussure developed the semiotic mediation theory emphasizing the relationship between two key components involved the signifier and the signified. The signifier represents the physical form of the element and principle of design. On the other hand, the signified delves into the interpretation and conceptual meaning. Together, this concept revealed the power interplay between the understanding of visual expression and the rich visual Interpretation to understand visual communication. Understanding the relationship of signifier and signified highlights how meaning is conducted and conveyed through signs. For instance, the interpretation of signs can be change over time and varies across different situations. The variability is influenced by several key factors including culture, society, politics and education. Each of these elements plays a significant role in shaping how meaning is understood and conveyed. Highlighting the importance of context in the interpretation process provides deeper insight into visual communication meaning associated with signs meaning. The intricate relationship between these two components empowers the basic foundation of visual image interpretation. Ultimately, by utilizing the concept of semiotic mediation, it revealed the deep layer of meaning contained within design elements, extending the understanding beyond the surface appearance. The integration of traditional elements into modern packaging influence consumer purchasing decision to choose product that reflect cultural identity (Liu & Zhao, 2024). This enriched understanding reveals the profound cultural narratives, emotional resonances and symbolic associations that facilitate a more effective visual interpretation. For example, others country like Japan, Indonesia and Thailand present the cultural value in advertisement to strengthen the cultural identity, authenticity an emotional connection. Japan's advertisement proudly showcase the richness of its culture in their signature green tea. While, Indonesia recognized in their signature *IndoMee*, a favorite dish among Indonesians.

Ajinomoto's advertisement example revolved around different scenarios in Malaysia's daily lifestyle. It included positive daily life in education, sports, cultural values, and promoting unity

among nations. We can see the image of the Parliament of Malaysia at the top of Ajinomoto's advertisement. It represents the national legislature of Malaysia based on the Westminster system. Hence, the political system of Malaysia is based on the Westminster model, which is a parliamentary system of government. This model is characterized by the presence of a ceremonial head of state and a head of government who is the leader of the majority party in the legislature. The Westminster model is named after the Palace of Westminster, the location of the UK Parliament (Aziz, 1999; Ibrahim, 2012). On the other hand, so many other visual rhetoric elements surround the main object. Thus, all images portray the positive cultural expression that promotes racial integration and spreads positivity and unity among Malaysians through design expression in Ajinomoto's advertisement. Cultural objects describe the creation, use, and distribution of objects that could communicate culturally meaningful messages and give value to others (E Mangone, 2018). We can clearly see how imagery information can be understood instantly without reading the other typography information below. The copywriting "*Bergerak Maju Bersama Malaysia*" gives language its verbal beauty. No color element was used during 1985. Moreover, the product advertisement in Ajinomoto acts as a potentially strategic tool to promote cultural values through product advertisement (as shown in Figure 1). Additionally, it aims to improve a design's aesthetic appeal and usability by using whole visual rhetoric elements. It included all elements such as images, typography, space, layout, and color. Packaging design's visual and verbal elements play a critical role in influencing consumers' purchase intention and decision-making process (Iris Borgman, 2018). It can help the designers present information visually for better understanding and communication through design implementation. Thus, it can create more memorable visual communication with consumers. Visual communication is important to tell stories, convey information, and share ideas. This paper reviews the Ajinomoto product advertisement (1985), which shows how visual rhetoric elements are important in showing multi-cultural expressions. It reveals and embrace Malaysia's culture value in the design implementation perspective. Moreover, social cohesion is one of the key factors that can enable harmony among different members of a society (Jagadale et al., 2022) and generate sustainable livelihoods (Little et al., 2023). Moreover, it is essential for every ethnic groups in Malaysia to foster a harmonious and mutual respect among diverse ethnicity. By integrating visual elements from various cultural tradition such as unique cultural heritage and symbols, Reflect the appreciation between ethnicities define Malaysian. The research position design important instrument for fostering connection in bridging social gap among ethnicities. On the other hand, it promoting social cohesion within beautiful Malaysia's multi-cultural country. Ultimately, multi-cultural expression powerfully celebrate the vibrant richness of Malaysian collective identity.

Methodology

This study involves a qualitative methodology to critically examine the indicated relationship between the component of visual rhetoric and the processes involved in semiotic visual interpretation. By analyzing these connections, the research seeks to enhance the understanding of visual elements function to convey meaning and effectively engage visual attention. Together, visual rhetoric and semiotic are essential components in the effectiveness of product advertisement, intricately crafting the way messages are conveyed and understood. The dynamic interplay shapes the effectiveness of deeper meaning and cultural significance behind images and signs that significantly influences consumer perception. Exploring the interpretation of semiotic, empower designers to craft an integrated visual narrative that effectively engages the target audience. The research offer practical guidelines for designers to design visual that communicate inclusive cultural identity more successfully. Designers have the capability to powerfully articulate positive value, belief and expectation to consumers through the right

strategic of design communication. The visual design strategy effectively convey intricate messages that align with the target audience and inspiring brand loyalty. Various elements of visual rhetoric have been examined through semiotic mediation. It reveals the profound impact and significance of interpretation represent the shared value, collective identity and cultural heritage of Malaysia. This research discovered the essential role of visual analysis in deconstructing the complexities of visual rhetoric. By applying semiotic mediation, it contributes to understanding how sign and symbol mediate meaning in multi-cultural expression defines beautiful Malaysia.

Result


Visual Analysis

This visual preliminary analysis of the Ajinomoto product advertisement (1985) (figure 1) is an example of cultural expression using visual rhetoric that applies a semiotic approach. It included visual rhetoric elements such as illustration or photography, typography, size or form, and graphic design elements. Unfortunately, the visual rhetoric element of color was not used in 1985. The use of visual and verbal elements of unique packaging design can showcase different cultures to consumers (Ambrose, 2018). It is important for those elements, in general, to attract consumers and help them understand cultural meaning through design in a better way. Thus, it can discover the value of unity and national integration among Malaysians. A good design layout might influence consumer preferences when buying products. Multi-cultural expression epitomizes the multifaceted ways in which individuals and communities articulate their identities, values, beliefs, and experiences. The use of visuals is more important than verbal in this advertisement. Visual rhetoric is influenced by the significance derived from visual interpretation, shaped by the overall contextual design. Design can transcend conventional boundaries and establish new ones that address contemporary cultural challenges (Buchanan, 2001). Visual rhetoric aids in simplifying complex situations and resolving encountered issues within design judgments. For example, it encompasses the symbolic or communicative visual elements such as typography, graphic imagery (photography and illustration), color/black and white, shape, size, and materials to convey messages in design. Conversely, visual rhetoric pertains to interpreting and comprehending meaning derived from visual communication. Understanding the relationship between visual rhetoric and semiotic, help consumers to see how visual shape their understanding in interpreting various layer of meanings. Imagery serves as a powerful tool in visual communication in presenting visual messages. It influences consumer's thought and behavior in respond the visual interpretation. Moreover, visual rhetoric can encompass various aspects in delivering visual meanings such as:

1. Employing imagery strategically in design layout.
2. Arrangement of different elements on the design layout.
3. Utilization of specific visuals and typography in design layout.
4. Examination of images and visual cues as design composition

Visual involves the process of reading signs and focused on their interpretation by different cultures and societies (Barthes, 1915). His semiotic theory often the sign processes to understand meaning. He believed the signs had both a signifier, being the physical form of the sign as we perceive it through our senses and the signified or meaning that is interpreted. Ajinomoto advertisement (1985) used this semiotic approach as the correlation between the signifier and the signified in the design layout (figure 2). According to Barthes' theory, every ideological sign is divided to Denotative sign system or a Connotative sign system. A denotative

sign, which is purely descriptive, results from the combination of the signifier (image) and the signified (concept). The interpretation changes due to various factors such as cultural shifts, changes in terminology, significant culture and belief, or simply the passage of time to understand meaning. There can be no words without images (Aristoteles & Kennedy, 2007). Our brains are better at remembering information that has been delivered using visuals compared to text or any verbal communication. The fact that pictures or visuals are generally better remembered than words or texts (Kirkpatrick, 1894). People only remember 10% of information after three days but remember 65% of information if it has a picture or visual. Pictorial or visual information takes less cognitive effort to process and is more attractive to our brains; it is a more efficient way to convey information. People remember pictures but struggle to retain text. While sight is our supreme sense, the truth is that we are inefficient when it comes to reading. Hence, this advertisement reinforced the perception of national unity and integration harmony in Malaysia. Semiotic theory offers a framework for designers to understand how visual rhetoric elements convey cultural meaning in design implementation. It is important for a designer to have a good understanding of visual rhetoric and applied in product advertisements. Thus, it will increase the creativity and evocative in design implementation for designers in the future.



PANEL 1	PANEL 2
1. Malaysia's flag & Parliament of Malaysia. ____ 2. Different Sport activity. ____ 3. National progress. ____ 4. Headline : "Bergerak maju bersama Malaysia." ____ 5. Brand image : Ajinomoto (Malaysia) Berhad. ____	1. Integration harmony feeling : love,peace,happiness. ____ 2. Education systems among ethnic group. ____ 3. Culture value & culture borrowing. ____ 4. Import & eksport activities. ____ 5. Copy writing : Hari ini genap 28 tahun negara kita merdeka. Kita bangga. Kita Megah. Megah melihat pembangunan pesat dan kemakmuran negara. Hasil dedikasi, kepimpinan cekap serta pandangan jauh para pemimpin kita. Berkat restu dan sokongan kuat rakyat jelata. Kepimpinan yang menjamin masa depan semua. Menuju zaman cemerlang berasaskan kestabilan ekonomi dan perpaduan bangsa. 6. Brand image : Ajinomoto (Malaysia) Berhad. ____

Figure 1: The analysis of visual rhetoric from panel and two panel

SIGNIFIER	SIGNIFIED
DENOTATIVE <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Malaysia's flag & Parliament of Malaysia 2. Different Sport activity 3. National progress 4. Integration harmony 5. Spiritual significance 6. Artistic value 7. International trade 8. Brand image 	CONNOTATIVE <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Express the historical importance of Malaysia icons. 2. Reveal the health benefits from the involvement in sports activities. 3. Showing education systems and unity through diversity by understanding one's ethics culture and promote unity feeling among Malaysian. 4. Manifest the emotion feeling of love, peace, happiness living as multi-cultural country. 5. Enhance the cultural authenticity and create stronger emotional bonds. 6. Symbolism to deliver cultural narratives into cohesive artistic design implementation. 7. Present the import & eksport activities that influence the GDP, exchange rate, level of inflation and interest rates of a counties. 8. Appear Ajinomoto (Malaysia) Berhad logo

Figure 2 : The analysis of the semiotic mediation interpretation

Discussion

By looking at the Ajinomoto advertisement (1985), consumers are able to see the cultural values of visual rhetoric expression in the advertisement design. By acknowledging the significance of cultural expression, researchers can contribute knowledge and an inclusive and culturally vibrant understanding of ethnic differences in Malaysia's society. Moreover, it is important to understand how cultural expression shapes individual and collective identities, influences social interactions, and informs creative practices across diverse cultural contexts in various aspects (figure 3)

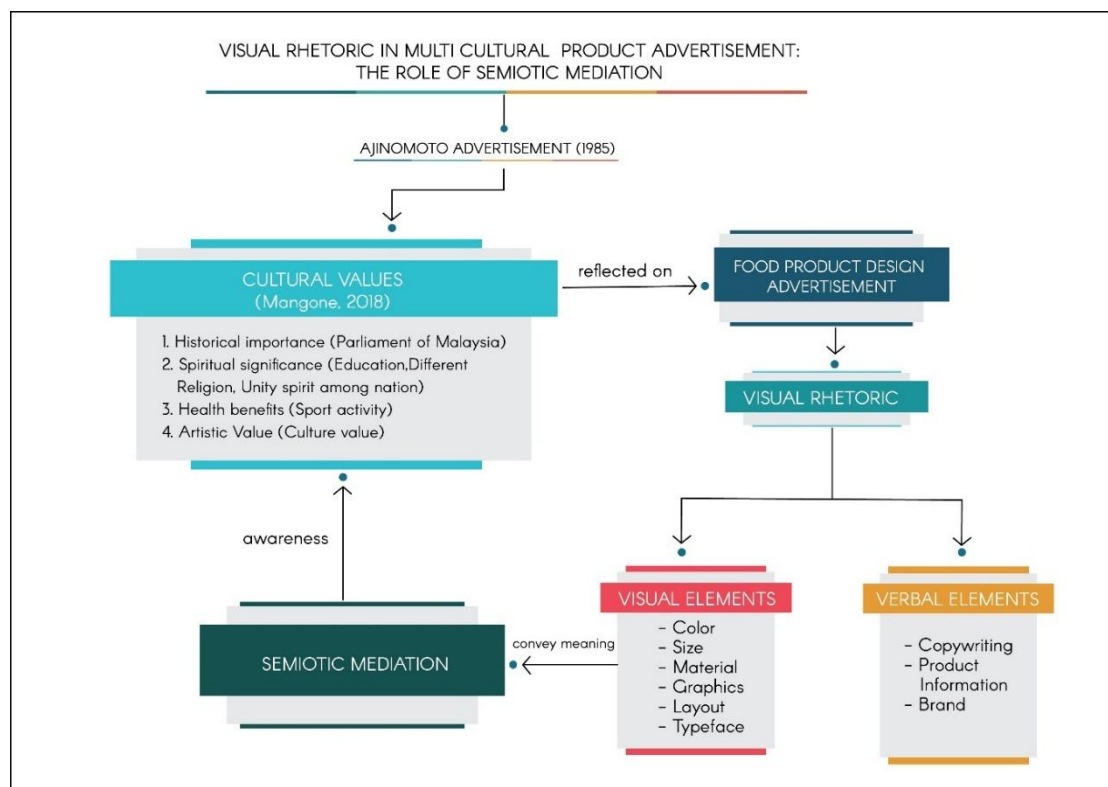


Figure 2: Conceptual framework of visual rhetoric implementation in Ajinomoto's product advertisement (1985)

Conclusion

The importance of incorporating cultural expression in product advertisement design is increasingly recognized. The trend highlights how cultural elements can enhance the effectiveness of marketing strategy by resonating more deeply with diverse audiences. Embracing Malaysia's multi-cultural design using visual rhetoric elements not only elevates the product's cultural heritage but also significantly enhances its perceived value. The approach adds depth to the product's aesthetic value and fosters a greater appreciation for the cultural narrative in the visual design. Hence, it may help to reinforce the perception of unity and integration among Malaysians. The research contributed to the academic field by bridging semiotic mediation and visual characteristics. It identify and interpret design element construct identity and meaning in multi-cultural design contexts. Also, the research offer practical guidelines for designers to design an inclusive cultural identity effectively. On the other hand, it reflects the richness of different cultural perspective in directing visual communication and marketing strategy. Ultimately, the research aims to critically identify and interpret the integration of positive cultural expression the finding Malaysian identity on food advertisement. It also foster a sense of national pride to strengthen the national spirit among the youngest generation. The understanding of visual rhetoric and semiotic embrace the unique way of ethnicity in Malaysia in effective visual representation.

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