

SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS: SHAPE AND COLOUR AS VISUAL COMMUNICATION IN SABAH FOOD PRODUCT LABELLING

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ABSTRACT

This study is one of the researches on graphic design of local product labels. Sabah's products are unique and competitive at its higher level. This study analyzes the quality and effectiveness of visual communication of snack product labelling to consumers according to aspects of art, design, and composition. The analysis begins with the collection of signs and the definition of each element on the label through Pierce's analytical theory and the classification approach of Stokes (2003), the design element consisting of images, letters, compositions, colours, and design displays on classified labels. Next, physical elements such as shapes and colours are interpreted by researchers. This study proof that semiotics can be used to interpret meanings and messages on the physical elements of labels. Aspects of shape and colour influence user psychology. The identity of a product can also be identified. The selection of graphic design elements on product labels can generate ideas for entrepreneurs to upgrade the quality of local products. Quality product labelling will have a positive impact on industrial tasters and be able to contribute knowledge to the industry itself.

Keywords: Design, food products, graphic elements, labelling, semiotics.

INTRODUCTION

Based on information from the Sabah Department of Industrial Development and Research, Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) has been in Sabah since 1978. According to Raihayu et al. (2019) who conducted the SME study in Malaysia, the industry faced several problems especially in obtaining loans. This is due to the competition faced by large industries. This affects the products they will produce, whether it is poor quality in terms of product presentation or without proper labelling.

Labels are considered as the identity of a product. Labels are a guideline for users to know what content can be avoided from allergic or health-harmful infections. The quality of label production should also be satisfactory such as, not dated, not easily worn and damaged, and has typography that is easy to read and clear (Alfred Satyahadi, 2013). According to SIRIM, section 10A stated three mandatory statements that should be on the label name of the product, net weight or quantity, as well as the exact manufacturer's address.¹ This statement will facilitate the user and avoid confusion. The images used should also be appropriate and clear for the user to know the types of products offered.

Local food products especially Sabah products are the main focus of this research. The importance of Sabah's product labels is less emphasized by the community, while most manufacturers also do not place any labels on their products. For example, merchants paste labels for decoration and just as a variation to differentiate their products. This negatively affects users regarding information that should be complete. Users will experience problems in avoiding substances that cause allergies, hygiene issues, and the safety of the product.

In general, communication is a process of generating meaning that not only processes the computation of a message (Fiske, 2004). To ensure that the communication process is understood by the community and executed, messages must be generated in the form of a sign (word or language). The resulting message will make people create meaning through their thoughts related to several meanings on the message. When sign systems are frequently used, the audience understands more clearly the meaning of the sign system. The whole can accept the meaning of the sign system. Thus, semiotics can be defined as knowledge about signs or symbols. It serves to communicate information and messages visually. The display of a picture, symbol, and sign can be easily translated and aligned by the audience as the recipient of the information and the message.

Various packaging innovations have been produced through the same products for re-branding and commercialization purposes. The same products are manufactured and differ in layout in labels as there are differences in the number of materials. The difference is also due to targeting factors and suitability to each type of user. Researcher has selected two products from several local food products manufacturer in Sabah. Bayu Asiana Sdn. Bhd. and Yit Foh Coffee Factory (M) Sdn. Bhd. Durian chocolate is one of the products that use the original ingredient and processed into snack food. The material is frozen so that it is dry and can last for up to a year or more. Moreover, Yit Foh instant coffee

is also one of the local choices' product durable up to a year or more, which also have selection of interesting visual elements in the label.



Figure 1 Snack products: Durian chocolate
Source: Bayu Asiana Sdn. Bhd

Durian chocolate product measures 25.5 cm x 13.5 cm. Harmonious colour combination, colour code of the packaging is *ffbd31* (PANTONE CODE). The main ingredients, durian fruit and chocolate products are displayed on the front of the label. Proboscis monkey (*Bayau*) as the shape of the logo placed on the bottom right of the product label. This label highlights Borneo characteristics in the overall packaging visual.



Figure 2 Beverage product: Yit Foh drip coffee
Source: Yit Foh Coffee Factory (M) Sdn. Bhd.

Yit Foh drip coffee product measures 12 cm x 12 cm. The ingredients in this instant coffee include coffee seeds grinded and refined sugars put together in the form of bags that facilitate consumers. The product can last up to a year or more due to dense packaging. This product uses simple graphical elements but still maintains the appropriate and structured use of colours and positioning elements. Images used such as coffee beans are clearly displayed on the label to make it easier for consumers to identify the types of products. Besides that, the product name is clearly show as a product of Borneo (Tenom Coffee).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Public education on the importance of labeling is less emphasized. Focusing on the local community especially, they are working on a simple takeaway product by marketing poor quality packaging even though the product is very selling. Homemade products, for example, paste labels simply for decoration and visually differentiate their products from other products and thus make a profit in the fertilization of their products. This has a negative impact on some communities on incomplete information, hygiene and safety issues of the product. Hence, there are several agencies that help the operator to strengthen the quality in packaging and labelling. One of the service agencies available in Malaysia is FAMA, responsible for the marketing of agro-based products such as vegetables and fruits as well as agro-based industrial products.

Although many Sabah food products are seen as having the potential to be marketed overseas, the regulatory aspect of the quality of products is not of concern. There is an issue that states that the production of mandatory labels to manufacturers and penalties are imposed on those who default in producing labels on each product. However, the legal requirements on food labelling this issue remain a question mark as there are still many products that are not labeled (Anis & Yusramizza, 2010). There are several aspects that can be traced from the survey of Sabah's local food products. These aspects are as such;

- a. Lack of research and development (R&D) in improving the quality of local food product labelling design.
- b. Standard labeling of nutritional products that are not complied with by the operator.
- c. The label design is less encouraging. Weaknesses can be seen in the technique of packaging, elements of design and incomplete information.

The design of the elements in the packaging is believed to affect the impact of purchase on the consumer of the product. Each item on the label is affected by the size, colour and image will have a different impact on its users. Mandatory labelling information in according to Section 10A, there are 3 mandatory statements that must be shown on the label. This rule specifically on the manner and location in which the following statements must be displayed. It is like the product name, quantity or net weight of the product as well as the name and address of the manufacturer should be accurate, easy to read and not confuse the buyer.

METHODOLOGY

Semiology was founded by Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913). According to Saussure, semiology leads to scientific understanding. The science of semiology stands as a fundamental discipline and succeeds in understanding the philosophy of signs. This semiological process conducted by Saussure is a process of understanding signs systematically and intellectually (Holdcroft, D., 1991). Through semiotic understanding, reality and culture with signals through processes that contain meaning.

The term semiotic derives from the Greek term “semeion” which means sign. Semiotic studies are about signs as an important part of life, culture, and communication. Semiotics is a communicative sign science in conveying something info or meaning. A sign is a representative of something elsewhere, it can be imagined or thought of. Semiotics is a study of knowledge regarding the assessment of everything related to the sign system and the process that occurs on the use of sign (Aart van Zoest, 1993).

Some past research has been conducted by western researcher on the semiotics of visual communication language. Tressidder (2010) in his study on the semiotics of product marketing states that a product is marketed, creating a brand, slogan, logo, icon and advertisement as its product promotion tool. Brands, slogans, icons, logos and advertisements provide product representations that relate to things of a mythical or cultural nature that the industry wants to create based on prevailing popular culture. The illustration of a product provided in the form of visual or non-visual advertisement is a force that determines the visual semiotic market performed on the advertisement in introducing the product. Tressider (2010) also found that ad design can influence consumer psychology and behavior in purchasing products.

Visual communication language has the potential in conveying messages (Sutanto, 2005). Language through visual communication can be recognized more easily and quickly than verbal, oral, written, or voice and audio language. Visual language is more effective than voice language that moves over some time movement. Visual language has a stronger symbolic value than verbal communication. According to Henderson et al. (2003), visual stimuli in advertising that introduce products become an important part of marketing strategy. Visual communication language can have a significant impact on the affections, cognition, and behavior of the audience. A brand can influence in building the sustainability and strength of the brand. Semiotic analysis cannot function alone because it relates to current popular culture and is followed by developments that take place in a community.

Logos, packaging, and advertisements should always be consistent and relevant to the ever-changing cultural environment (Oswald, 2007). Semiotics has important applications for controlling brand strategies by helping to clarify brand identity, personality, and integrity in delivering brands. The industry should develop products with designs that are not only attractive but also bring in depth understanding with certain characteristics resulting from existing brands in established core values (Karjalainen, 2007).

Shapes become visual markers that are incorporated from points and lines (Danesi, 2004). Various forms can be visualized through a visual representation to represent a sign, while each such sign has a meaning. Various forms can be described as a visual representation to represent a sign, while each sign contains a meaning. Geometric shapes allow us to conclude about reality from ourselves. This happens because there is basic geometry instability that symbols from different cultures around the world (Danesi, 2004).

Colours can evoke the hidden human responses and emotions. The choice of colours in a graphic design can produce a very strong appeal in product advertising. The expression and principle of colour lie in the elements of beauty, attractiveness, influence, appearance, image, and control of emotions, through the selection and harmonious combination to be able to display psychological influences. Appropriate colour selection and consideration give a positive identity or image to the featured product (Kress & Leeuwen, 2002).

According to Dharma et al. (2010), colour has an important role in a visual semiotic investigation which is effective as a sign that has a different meaning. Colours can influence interest through visual advertising to buy

a product (Kress & Leeuwen, 2002). Visual semiotic analysis is carried out through the process of giving meaning in each element of colour used. Each colour contains different meanings, this proves that semiotic visual research through colour relates to the prevailing cultures and myths.

The role of colour is very influential in the appearance of a design product (logo) because with contrasting and attractive colours it will be easier for the audience to remember it. According to Wescott (1980), he states that colours are used for connotative purposes around the world while archaeological records interpret that the approach through the visual and emotional meanings affixed to colours is the origin of the term colours themselves.

A variety of products are sold with its interesting packaging colour variations and product label designs. Manufacturers of each product should ensure that their products have enough labels for their users as compared to previous 20 or 30 years of products manufacture who only care about the existing products. We can see labels placed on all products manufactured by large industries and small industries. The importance of product labelling is that using product labels consumers can differentiate a product. This is because users cannot identify the product by simply looking at the product name.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research is based on analysis method through theories and approaches chosen. The method implemented is to interpret the graphic design elements, representations and objects found in the labeling of Sabah products by using Semiotic theories, analysis of Stokes to interpret the media.

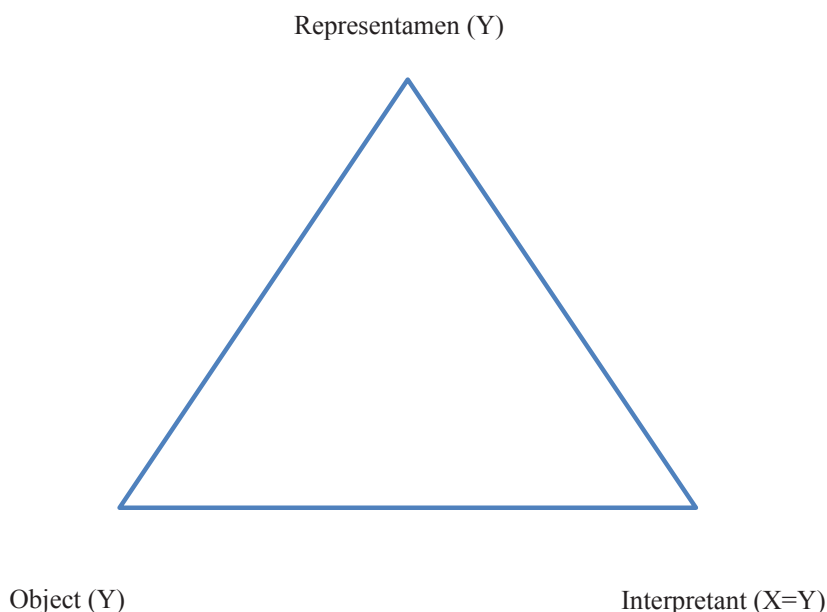


Figure 3 Triadic Peirce (1839-1914)
Source: Danesi (2004)

Peirce (1839-1914) stated that a sign is a representative and an object is a concept, idea, or item, meaning, in turn, is the perceptions, feelings, and thoughts achieved from a sign referred to as ‘interpretation’ (Danesi, 2004). The sign model put forward by Peirce (1839-1914) was taxonomy or triadic. According to Peirce, sign interpretation indicates a relationship between three points that are Representative (X), Object (Y), and Interpretation (X = Y). X is the part of the sign that can be felt physically, by referring to something represented by Y, then X = Y is part of the process of explaining the relationship between X and Y.

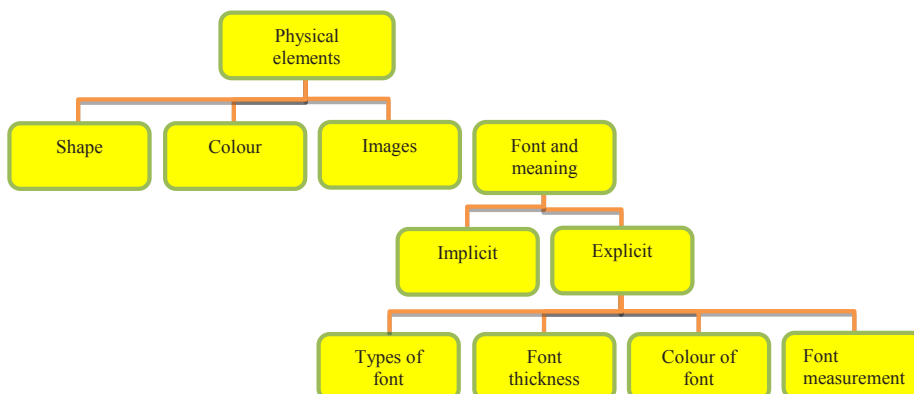


Figure 4 Semiotic analysis of Stokes (2003)

In analyzing the data, semiotic analysis according to Stokes (2003) is applied to start by determining the object of analysis and the group of marks to be analyzed in the product labels. Next, the signs visible on the label were analyzed and listed. In the semiotic analysis by Stokes (2003), there are four dimensions of the physical element, consisting of (1) shape, (2) colour, (3) picture, and (4) writing and order (Figure 2). However, this research analysis describes colour and shape as the focus. At a later stage, the results of the taxonomic analysis on labels are described as interpretations based on the theory of sign by Peirce (1839-1914).

ANALYSIS

In this research, visuals on labels were observed by researcher. The elements in both labels are elaborated to see the interpretation of each existing element. For the physical elements of shapes, product logos are elaborated. Meanwhile, colour is classified into several elements in the label, background, illustration or image, and typography. The assessment of the elements on the label are as follows:

Table 1 Label analysis of Durian Chocolate

Elements in Labels		Representation (X)	Object (Y)	Interpretation (X=Y)
Shape	Logo	Square/ Rectangle company logo	Equilibrium	The square or rectangular shape depicts balance, professionalism and proportion. Squares or rectangles are enough to instill trust when buyers are looking for the strength and safety of a product. ²
		The round shape on the product logo	Perfection	The round shape carries the meaning of perfection. ³
Colour	Background	Yellow	Warmth, brightness, and energy.	Warm colours fill the background space. Provokes the psychology of feelings of joy, happiness, and energy.
	Illustrations/ images	Durian	Real food ingredients.	The actual colour of the durian image on the label is an affirmation that the consumption of the actual ingredients of the product. It is also an affirmation of the type of food ingredients of the product used directly.
	Typography	Product name	Monochrome and purple colour.	Use a combination of monochrome and purple colours in the product name as a contrast to the background. Creates a feeling of calm, luxurious, and exotic.

The shape on this label represents two objects, company logo and the product logo. The representation (X) of company logo is square or rectangular which represents perfection. Each side of the logo has the same size or exact nature. The interpretation of the objects is a rectangular shape which depicting balance, professionalism, and proportion. A square or rectangle is enough to instill the trust of buyers in offering strength and safety. Meanwhile, the round shape on the product logo represents perfection. The product logo makes it easy for users to recognize the product directly while it's also describing the perfection of chocolate flavour.

The background colour that dominates the label is yellow. Yellow carries the meaning of warmth, brightness, and full of energy. This warm colour also evokes psychology feelings of joy, and happiness (Mir Hazil Azran Ramli, 2009). The illustrations and pictures used on the label are durian which represents the main ingredient of the product. The image of durian on the label is an affirmation that the actual ingredient consumption of the product. The use of colour on typography which is the product name, applies monochrome colour and purple colour combination. The use of colour in the name of this product is a contradiction between the text and the background. This colour also evokes a feeling of calm, luxury and exotic.

Table 2 Label analysis of Yit Foh Drip Coffee

Elements in Labels		Representation (X)	Object (Y)	Interpretation (X=Y)
Shape	Logo	The company logo combines typography in a cup-shape	<i>The best coffee brand from Tenom since the 1960's.</i>	The shape of the cup on the logo is combined with the words Yit Foh. Yit Foh Coffee Factory Sdn. Bhd. is one a major coffee producer in the state of Sabah, Malaysia.
		Round shape on additional description	Circle shape on additional description of "100% Ground Coffee"	Emphasis on additional descriptions.
Colour	Background	Black	Background colour	Suitable of coffee colour.
	Illustrations/ images	A serving of coffee in a glass	Illustration of product	Depicted of the actual product. Facilitate users to identify the appearance and shape of the product.
	Typography	Organic form	The shape of coffee beans	The main material of the product used, quality product material.

The company logo combines typography in a cup-shape. It introduces coffee as a main product of this company. Yit Foh Sdn. Bhd. product is the best coffee brand from Tenom since the 1960's. Moreover, the shape of the cup on the logo is combined with the words Yit Foh. Yit Foh Coffee Factory Sdn. Bhd. is one a major coffee producer in the state of Sabah, Malaysia. Round shape on additional description of "100% Ground Coffee" of emphasis the description written.

The background colour uses of the label is black. Which suitable of coffee colour. Black colour can have a luxurious and elegant feel because of its simple nature and not excessive. Sometimes simplicity can actually be something more expensive in value. A serving of coffee in a glass as an illustration of product depicted of the actual product. Facilitate users to identify the appearance and shape of the product. Moreover, organic form of the shape of coffee beans carry the main material of the product which a quality product material used.

CONCLUSION

Both products that chosen has a design that can attract the attention of consumers with the use of strong colours and a clear contrast between the product and the background. The size of the typography is according to the standards set; the product name is easy to read with a choice of prominent colours. The use of different topographies in labels reflects diversity in label design. However, Durian Chocolate label has more visual elements depicted Borneo identities. Durian Chocolate uses various images that related to Sabah. Yit Foh drip coffee's label design is simpler and more elegant. Less images used and more to introduce product through words.

The results show that colour and shape in label graphic design are important as visual communication to the user of the product. Both play a role in explaining meaning and information to a targeted audience. Each element of physics, shape and colour explains the information implicit in the visual being depicted. An attractive visual appearance will be able to attract the attention of the targeted audience. Therefore, the results of this study support the assumptions of semiotic theory in visual communication language. It also provides an opportunity for researchers to interpret broadly the existing signs or symbols.

NOTES

- ¹ <https://www.gs1my.org> Significant provisions in food packaging and labelling issued by SIRIM, Referenced on 7 March 2020.
- ² <https://www.quickprint.co.id/post/psikologi-bentuk-logo>.
- ³ Bahasa Komunikasi Visual dan Pengantaraan Produk: Satu Analisis Semiotik; Faridah Ibrahim.

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