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STANDARDIZING MALAYSIAN VEHICLE REGISTRATION NUMBER PLATE

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Abstract

Every registered vehicle possesses its own unique registration number as identity recognition. It is like a citizen owning his or her own identification number in identification card, MyKad for example in Malaysia. This unique vehicle registration number regularly being used as first reference in obtaining information regarding the vehicle. Internationally, it is necessary to display registration number at each front and backside of every vehicles. Application of number plate display format is vary in different countries. Again, the presentation of vehicle registration number plate is persistence as a national vehicle passport. As citizen of a nation, passport is the citizen's pride when travelling and so does the exhibition of Malaysian vehicle number plate. Malaysian vehicle registration number plate was adapted from Britain's car registration number plates that were brought in by the governors from Britain. It was before the establishment of Lembaga Pengangkutan Jalan on 1937. Later on 1st April 1946, Lembaga Pengangkutan Jalan was converted to Jabatan Pengangkutan Jalanraya (JPJ) under Kementerian Pengangkutan dan Jalan. Since establishment, Malaysian vehicle number plate had encountered very few updates in visuals and formats. The outcome of this study will be proposed to Jabatan Pengangkutan Jalanraya Malaysia to overcome the substandard Malaysian vehicle license number plate.

Author Keywords: Malaysian Vehicle Registration; Ceramic; Plate Number

INTRODUCTION

The main function of vehicle registration number plate is to deliver information towards authorization of the vehicle. It is an international requirement for every registered vehicle either passenger or commercial vehicle to display license number plate. France was the first country to introduce number plate in 14 August 1893 under Police Ordinance. Later in 1898 The Netherlands was the first country to introduce a national license plate, called a "driving permit".

Vehicle registration number plate is a unique visual communication tool that displays important information. This information will determine the vehicle origin, type of registered vehicle and act as a benchmark for quantity of registered vehicle in particular state.

Although it is indispensable, Jabatan Pengangkutan Jalanraya Malaysia had never developed a true progression in upgrading Malaysian vehicle registration number plate. Due to that inattention, significant conflicts between vehicle owner and authorities has occurred concerning distresses in standards and legislation of Malaysian vehicle registration number plate. This study will establish the new visual standards, guideline and legislation of Malaysian vehicle license number plate.

METHODOLOGY

Unstandardized Malaysian vehicle number plate is a discernable national issue that involves practicality of visual communication and the need of understanding human behavior. It is an issue that had been nationally announced by authorities but initial observation and survey has been made to pinpoint the exact foundation that contributes to such national setback. Below, is the methodology

framework that the researcher is going to conduct during the field work. Further details on how the design research flow could be observed through Diagram1.

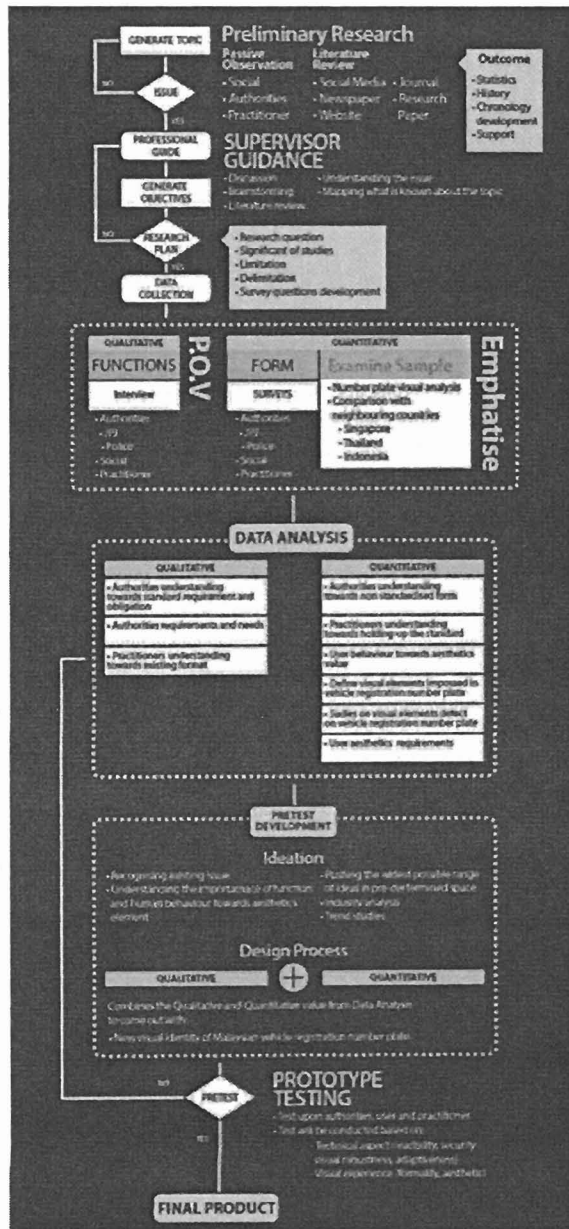


Diagram 1: Research design on Malaysian Vehicle Registration Number Plate

Examining The Tool

License plate is the tool that delivers visual communication. A thorough examination and analysis had been conducted on current Malaysian vehicle number plate. The outcome from 200 randomly selected vehicle through out Kuala Lumpur and Johor Bahru yielded prominent issues regarding the preservation of rightful visual element practice and guideline. Variant altered visual element is scrutinized and compared to the original JPJ number plate guideline. To understand human behavior contribution into the un-uniformity of Malaysian vehicle number plate, a point of view approach was selected to dig empathetic value from user. Survey was distributed out to selected 100 respondents. Statistic from the survey later analyzed and compared with the visual analysis findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Elements Of Malaysian Vehicle Number Plates

From observation conducted at Jabatan Pengangkutan Jalanraya and 5 license plate manufacturer in Johor Bahru, insufficiency in understanding the vital element involve in the license plate characteristic contributes to faltering license plate format.

Malaysian vehicle number plate is a compulsory visual communication tool but currently it is poor in displaying information. Most license plate recognition studies also mentioned similar setback. It is hard for number plate recognition system to detect un-uniform license plate. Problematic license plate detection mainly triggered by myriad of number plate variations. Human involvement in personal modifications and errors that was influenced by weariness instigated by natural elements towards license plate has become the main protagonist in license plate un-uniformity. This problem is not only occurred in Malaysia as technical studies regarding License Plate Recognition system have been done in many countries as well. Through technical studies, a large number of license plate detection systems have been developed. With each new recognition system developed, there is always newer obstruction regarding license plate comprehension.

Relevant to that inadequacy, detail visual analysis towards current Malaysia vehicle license plate has been conducted. Since it comprises visual communication it is suitable to refer Gail Greet Hannah in her book *Elements Of Designs*. According to the book, there are 10 elements to understand the fundamental of the subjects. These elements are standards in visual academic learning.

1. Color
2. Layout
3. Typeface
4. Alignment
5. Parameter
6. Scale
7. Dominance and emphasis
8. Harmony
9. Balance

Visual analysis divulges that 7 crucial elements related to elements of design existed in Malaysian vehicle license plate. These elements are invisible to the naked eyes to detect. Therefore current standard is so fragile since these elements are often misrepresented without proper guideline.

Color

Malaysia vehicle license plate consisting two basic colors, black for base plate and white for alpha numeric as displayed in Figure 1. The combination of black space and white character are characteristic of negative space recreation and contrast. As affirmed by Urban, 2010 in his article Use Of Negative Space In Graphic Design, Malaysian number plates consist all plain elements that make up the framework. The subject is the alphanumeric and the negative space as a frame surrounding the alphanumeric, which in Malaysian vehicle registration number plate is the black background.

In graphic design, negative space also known, as White Space does not only exist in monochrome. White space also could be created by the use of any color. Sampling from Malaysian vehicle registration number plate, white space implemented as the separator of group and ads emphasis towards alphanumeric features in it.



Figure 1: Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur vehicle registration number plate. Longitude or one line format. (Source: Mat Fairuz Ruzali)

The use of black and white created definite contrast. According to Smith, contrast is one of the most prevailing design concepts. A design element can be contrasted with another. Appropriate submission of contrast can help create a clearly dominant design. This achievement aids the observer “progress” the point of design firmer. Every good design has a strong and clear focal point and having a clear contrast among elements.

Layout

“Layout refers to the arrangement of elements on a page usually referring to specific placement of image, text and style” (Jamie, 2013).

Rendering Prust (2010) body type, display type, illustrations, and white space are the elements of layout and the arrangement of them in a layout must be pleasing to the eye and easy to read. Prust also acknowledged “if the same elements were given to several artists, it is very probable that different layouts would be submitted”. This sustenance the fact of existence in variation of layout produced by the commercial number plate maker. There two different types of layout in current Malaysia vehicle license plate. Longitude or one line format (Figure 1) features alphabets and numbers represented in one row. This type of layout is often applied on car license plate.

While stacked or 2 row format displays different placement for alphabets and numbers. This format placing the alphabets on top of numbers and often can be seen on smaller vehicle license plate.

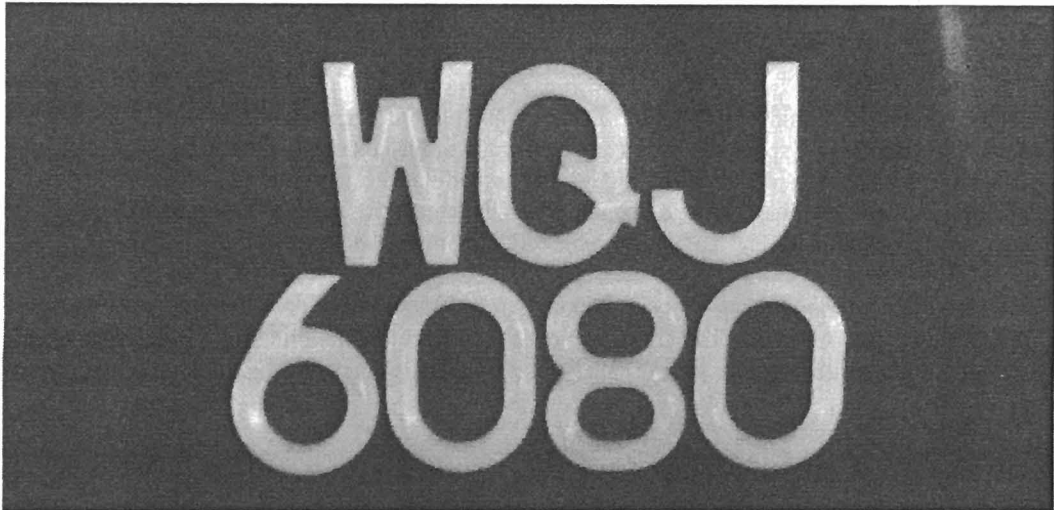


Figure 2: Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur vehicle registration number plate. Stacked or two row format. (Source: Mat Fairuz Ruzali)

Typeface

Typeface is the most important elements in every vehicle number plate. From prior analysis, typeface consumes 70% of number plate visuals. Most of number plate recognition system focuses segmentation of typeface as mentioned by Wisam Al Faqheri and Syamsiah Mashohor (2009). Malaysian vehicle number plate only applies uppercase lettering as practiced by other country. Jabatan Pengangkutan Jalanraya only ruled out Arial as official font for license plate. But Arial font has so many family and different font style. Additionally, there are numberless fonts look as the same as Arial typeface such as Myriad and Tahoma to name a few. Current behavior among vehicle owner more intended to apply European type number plate font that is DIN1415.

DIN1415

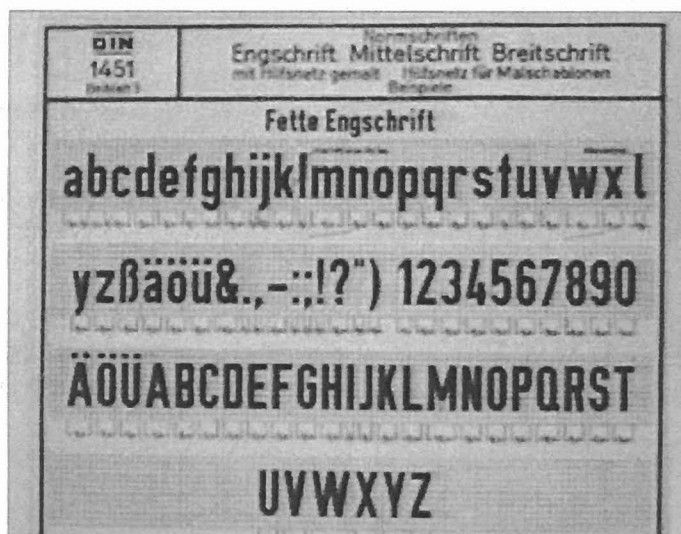


Figure 4: DIN1415 typeface table. (Source: Wikipedia)

The European Union shares the same number plate format for each country. Unlike the United States, in Europe the specific fonts used on number plates may be mandatory and legislated by the national government. Current European number plate uses variant from DIN1415 typeface. Conferring to idsgn A Design Blog, DIN was originally introduced when the Prussian railway need to fulfill the purpose of unifying the descriptions on their freight cars. The typeface master drawing was released by AG foundry in 1923 as the earliest version of a DIN face.

Later in 1936 Germany adopted DIN face as a standard known as DIN 1451 (DIN is an acronym for Deutsches Institut für Normung—in English, the German Institute for Standardization). The typeface became a standard for traffic signs, street signs, house numbers and license plates. Over the next decades the typeface also found use on various household goods and products, making it synonymous with German design.

DIN 1451's Visual Vocabulary

“Most distinguishing feature of DIN 1451 is the use of straight vertical sides on characters such as C, D, G, O, and Q that would otherwise feature continuously rounded arcs. Also, curved strokes are based on perfectly circular rather than ovalized/ elliptical arcs. Both of these characteristics give DIN 1451 its simple and basic industrial feel or “constructivist” looks.”

Leeward Productions

Such monospaced or fixed width design is typical practice for number plates and an accommodation to the desire for a predictable amount of allotted space for any given plate number, regardless of the specific characters used.

There is an argument regarding monospaced typeface effects on human reading capability. According to Quora, 2013 monospaced destroy the shapes of words that greatly enhance word recognition. Word recognition, according to Literary Information and Communication System (LINCS) is “the ability of a reader to recognize written words correctly and virtually effortlessly.” It is sometimes referred to as “isolated word recognition” because it involves a reader’s ability to recognize words individually from a list without needing similar words. LINCS continues to say, “rapid and effortless word recognition is the main component of fluent reading”.

Alignment

Alignment is one of four main principle of graphic design. In Malaysian vehicle number plate it prevail as the most violated elements. Eventhough Jabatan Pengangkutan Jalanraya has come out with measurement; still it is not applied accordingly to specification.

“The whole point of the alignment principle is that nothing in design should look as if it were placed randomly”, Garr Reynolds (2008). Alignment is about obtaining unity among elements of a single design. Even elements that are quite separated on a design should have a visual connection. This visual connection is achievable with the custom of grids. JPJ have failed to make an effort to apply the alignment principal, which often results in elements being nearly aligned but not entirely. This may not seem like a big covenant, but these kinds of design look less sophisticated and overall less professional. The audience may not be conscious of it, but design that contain elements in alignment look cleaner. And assuming other principles are applied harmoniously as well, the design should be easier to quickly be recognized.

Parameter

Parameter is basically the extra empty area that is not consumed by the alphanumeric on number plate. Even though that space is empty, it does not mean it could be violated. Most problems occurred when this extra space is violated with information or decoration item that is not related with displaying vehicle registration number. Most common parameter violation ascended from aesthetic customization such as placing the ownership of the vehicle sticker and state flag / logo sticker. This mishap of liberal misapplication by the user transpired to the principal of proximity in design.

Principal of Proximity

“The principle of proximity is simply the process of ensuring related design elements are placed together” Smith (2014). Any impertinent matters should be spaced apart. The principle says that related items should be grouped together so that they will be viewed as a group, rather than as several unrelated elements. Audiences will assume that items that are not near each other in a design are not closely. Vice versa if irrelevant item is placed together with the much-needed item it will make both items united as one design. Naturally, audience cultivates to group similar items that are near to each other into a single unit.

Robin Williams, in her best-selling book *The Non-Designer’s Design Book* says that we must be conscious of where our eye goes first when we step back and look at our design. When you look at the number plate, notice where should be look at first. A deeper study extracted that Principal of proximity is part of Gestalts Theory of Visual Perception. This psychological theory describes how people tend to organize visual elements into groups or unified wholes when certain principles are applied.

“The whole is other than the sum of the parts.”

-Kurt Koffka

When user violated the parameter of the number plate with unrelated element, it involuntarily transliterated the actual number plate format and the abuse as a whole. The parameter violation has amalgamated with the actual format of Malaysian vehicle number plate thus perplexing the authentic format of number plate.

Shape

Top Gear Magazine June issue revealed 382 models from 46 local and imported car manufacturers were registered in Malaysia. Local car manufacturer mainly Proton and Perodua provides 12 different models of passenger vehicle model. Most of 382 models share the same base plate shape. Baseplate shape is basically the contour the black plate that holds the alphanumeric on number plate. Each vehicle model possesses different front and rear façade and normally number plate area is designated at lower bumper area, both front and rear. Without standard shape of the baseplate, current number plate profile is easily manipulated according to vehicle face and rear end contour. From preliminary observation, a definitive transgression was discovered when the blending number plate with the face and rear end of the vehicle again violates the principal of proximity. The caused of this contravention is often happened to vehicle with black or darker color property. This occurrence translated as cohesive group rather than separated individual while both number plate and vehicle bumper execute totally different task.

Uniformity VS Social Intervention

Uniformity according to Merriam Webster dictionary is “the quality or state of being the same: the quality or state of being uniform or identical”. Taken from dictionary.com uniformity translated as “the state or quality of being uniform; overall sameness, homogeneity, or regularity”. “Uniformity and consistency help users extract meaning from the design of an application, keeping them focused on the tasks and not distracted by design ambiguities. Elements such as visual hierarchy, proportion, alignment, and typography play major parts in the uniformity of a design” Jannaq (2010)

The reason why one design is considered good is because the design follows one or all the principle of Gestalt. Bradley (2010). Understanding gestalt principles will give greater control over designs, create more harmonious designs, and increase the likelihood message is communicated to audience. Gestalt is a German word translated as “shape” or “form”. The expression refers to how visual input is perceived by human beings. Gestalt psychology was founded by Max Wertheimer and has been added to over the years. This observation led to a set of descriptive principles about how we visually perceive objects. These principles sit at the heart of nearly everything we do graphically as designers known as Gestalt Principles.

These principles were developed over a number of years, but came to prominence in part thanks to Rudolf Arnheim’s 1954 book, *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye*. To summarise there are six common, basic Gestalt Principles;

1. Similarity
2. Continuation
3. Closure
4. Proximity
5. Figure/Ground
6. Symmetry and order

It is a compulsory requirement for all vehicles registered in Malaysia to display their license number plate. Each vehicle posses it’s own unique registration number. Even though each registration number is unique the visual display of it are in uniform of number plate apparatus. This uniformity is vital for enforcement and commercial handling. Enforcement such as Jabatan Pengangkutan Jalan-raya works together with Kastam Diraja Malaysia to monitor entering vehicle into Malaysian road.

More related use of license plate between user and enforcement is to invigilate the transgression of vehicle user. Polis Diraja Malaysia especially traffic department depends the most on vehicle license plate. Any traffic disobedience conducted by user will refer to vehicle license plate through camera detection if the offender absconded prior police engrossment. Another prominence use by Polis Diraja Malaysia not only limited to traffic offender. Some criminal case will refer to vehicle license plate as the first step of investigation. In commercial use, license plate is use by insurance provider as vital information in insurance claim case especially when vehicle involved in a road accident. Toll and parking operator also refer to vehicle license plate in case of service misconduct by the user.

Contradiction to Gestalt, the existence of user intervention in customizing their vehicle number plate is a result of Social Comparison Theory.

Social Comparison Theory was published in the *Journal of Human Relations* in 1954 written by Leon Festinger. The author tackles the fundamentals of how a person forms beliefs and opinions about one's own capabilities. According to Festinger, human beings have the drive to assess their opinions and to know more about their abilities and when they are incapable of evaluating their opinions and abilities, they tend to compare themselves with others.

Social comparisons - comparisons between the self and others - are a fundamental psychological mechanism influencing people's judgments, experiences, and behavior. (Katja Corcoran, Crusius, Mussweiler, 2010). Whenever they are confronted with information about how others are, what others can and cannot do, or what others have achieved and have failed to achieve, they relate this information to themselves (Dunning & Hayes, 1996). The theory explains how individuals evaluate their own opinions and abilities by comparing themselves to others in order to reduce uncertainty in these domains, and learn how to define the self.

Individuals may also seek self-enhancement, or to improve their self-esteem. Entities may interpret, distort, or ignore the information gained by social comparison to see themselves more positively and further their self-enhancement goals as described by Wood, 1989 in his publication "Theory and research concerning social comparisons of personal attributes." Unnatural modifications bring the most alarming possessions on license plate. Human intervention in tempering license plate appearances contravene with authority regulation. From survey conducted between license plate producer and vehicle owner, most modifications were literally requested by the owner of the vehicle itself. One of the most popular temperaments on license plate is using decorative fonts, which is not up to regulations. Information gathered from survey conducted on 50 respondents, 42% agreed that current Malaysia vehicle license plate is not attractive enough for display. Total of 99% of respondents are aware that Jabatan Pengangkutan Jalanraya has constructed a format for license plate. But, the need to personalize their vehicle license plate overcomes the authority's proposal. Furthermore, all license plate manufacturers afford various options to vehicle owner to personalize their vehicle license plate. Uncontrolled re-production of number plate by commercial number plate manufacturer have been profiting from the ambiguity. They have been re-producing various options for materials, lettering and even generated their own formats, which attracts owner who seeks for better proposal in visual quality.

Conclusion

Nowadays, license plate function not just for vehicle registration. It becomes more important laterally with technology advancement in vehicle today. 3M a global innovation company has proposed a new generation of license plate. This new creation incorporated with Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) embedded into vehicle license plate. Number plate recognition has become beyond visual since it is now can be recognize by the use of RFID detection system. But, to accomplish that method require a full RFID system by 3M. This would create another issue where authority will become too dependable onto one system. According to Danish Centre for Design Research, only India and South Korean, which are from Asia region, apply national design policy at government level. South Korea stands out for having the most complete design system. National Design System study is still yet to be explored and uncover. Department of Standards Malaysia under Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (MOSTI) has produced "Guide to the Malaysian Standards System", but there is no specific committee that governs the visuals communications design standard in Malaysia.

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