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VISUAL AND VERBAL IDENTITY IN NAELOFAR'S RANGE OF PRODUCTS

a chapter by

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Introduction

Modest fashion is a global trend, valued at $277 billion and projected to reach $311 billion by 2024 (High Style, High Growth, 2022). Malaysia is a major market for modest clothing, driven by the increasing middle-class and growing purchasing power. The industry's expansion is fueled by Malaysia's apparel market need, with numerous modest fashion entrepreneurs and brands, such as Noor Neelofa Mohd Noor of Naelofar.

Naelofar, a Malaysian business founded in 2014, specialises in modest attire, gaining global attention by offering a diverse range of products, including hijabs, clothing, purses, prayer mats, perfumes, bags and accessories. The brand's commitment to delivering high-quality products at affordable rates has made them accessible to customers worldwide, promoting confidence and empowerment in modest attire, as reflected in its central brand commitment encapsulated in the slogan "Go Far."

There are many criteria that contribute towards customers' buying decisions - among them is the presence of brand identity in a product. A company's brand identity is the culmination of all the aspects it develops to communicate the appropriate message to its customers which distinguishes a business from that of its competitors (deBara, 2017). The elements can comprise communication, logo, behaviour, language, mission, vision, culture and design (Hopper, 2022). Generally, all these aspects can be categorised into two distinct concepts that are visual and verbal identity. A visual identity, on the other hand, influences perception and makes an impact with the brand's visible aspects such as the images and graphical information (Levanier, 2020). While a verbal identity is the expression of a brand through words by using clear and focused language (Branding for the People, 2023).

Problem statement

According to Statista Research Department (2023), based on a survey performed in Malaysia in January 2023, it was discovered that a majority of the respondents, namely over 68% which is the highest percentage, expressed a preference for engaging in online shopping for fashion-related products. This proves that clothing items are the most purchased products among Malaysians. In terms of clothing brands, Naelofar.com was at the 17th rank in the clothing market of Malaysia, with a revenue of over US$1 million in the year 2022 (eCommerce DB, n.d.).

Several studies have been conducted on Naelofar brand items. Most of the studies concern identity construction of Malay/Muslim women (Ahmad & Dawam, 2022; Hassan & Ara, 2021; Hassim, 2017a; Hassim, 2017b; Hassim & Mohamad, 2020; Ree et al., 2020; Teh et al., 2018, Zamri & Osman, 2022). Other areas were marketing strategy (Isamudin, 2021; Ismail et al., 2018b; Jamrin, 2019; Jasman et al., 2022), brand loyalty (Mohamed et al., 2019), consumer consumption experiences (Rosely et al., 2021) and headscarf design (Ismail et al., 2018a). However, there have been no or little studies conducted exclusively on the visual and verbal aspects of Naelofar's brand identity and therefore, examining these elements are imperative.

Neelofa's NH Prima International's accomplishment is the outcome of its capability to successfully design, produce, promote and supply its products (Ahmad et al., 2022). Ahmad et al. (2022) claim that the victory of NH Prima International is contributed by the company's excellent brand and effective marketing strategies. Nevertheless, the manner in which the company

presents its brand, especially concerning visual and verbal elements, remains unclear. Therefore, the present study was deemed necessary and is conducted in order to confirm the marketing strategies used by her company for academic contributions to the literature. Additionally, in doing so, this can enrich the literature with additional information about one of the popular brands in Malaysia, bridging the knowledge gap in the literature exclusively on Naelofar products. This can be an area worth exploring, after all, semiotic aspects - visual and verbal contribute to the premise of meaning-making.

Research Questions

Thus, the intention of this research paper is to address the following objectives:
1. How is visual identity utilised to showcase Naelofar's range of products?
2. How is verbal identity projected in Naelofar's range of products?

Literature Review

Advertisements on Instagram

Several recent studies have examined Instagram's usefulness as a marketing tool, notably in Malaysia. One research uses the AIDA model, which stands for Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action, to assess the ten most effective hijab brand advertisements promoted on Instagram (Jasman et al., 2022). According to the findings, Instagram is an excellent tool for promoting business and creating interest and interaction among its target audience. Another research looked at social media usage data in Malaysia and discovered that Instagram is the preferred site for individuals seeking a more curated and visually attractive experience (Howe, 2023). The study also highlighted the importance of social media advertising in the digital marketing landscape, with Twitter and Instagram traffic significantly increasing as users become more accustomed to social media. Additionally, a study on Instagram advertising costs found that Instagram continues to grow, and its advertising options are becoming more robust, making it an important part of the advertising funnel for driving brand awareness and engagement (DeFazio, 2023). Overall, these studies suggest that Instagram is an

effective marketing tool for businesses in Malaysia with the platform's visual nature and advanced targeting capabilities making it a valuable asset for promoting brands and products.

2.2 Brand identity as a marketing strategy

Brand identity is a communication tool that has the ability to successfully contribute to effective brand management with customers (Roy & Banerjee, 2014). A widely accepted principle in marketing is that a brand has the ability to differentiate its goods or services from its rivals' (Jin et al., 2019). Brand identity is a crucial concept that leads to a persistent competitive benefit and serves as a foundation for differentiation (Bravo et al., 2017). In other words, the practice of firms cultivating their own power brands via the creation of a distinct and influential image results in customers forming distinctive views of a certain brand in their thoughts (Jin et al., 2019). Brand identity refers to the tangible or physical features of a brand, including its logo, slogan, colours, sounds, smells, packaging, location, and corporate characteristics, and these aspects assist consumers in recognizing and differentiating the brand from its competitors and other products (Wijaya, 2013). These elements of a brand are important in shaping a brand's identity and marketing its product. For example, Jin et al. (2019) argue that ensuring a consistent portrayal of colour and imagery in a brand's identity helps enhance consumer trust in the brand. Kim and Lim (2019) claim that logos may take the form of typography, imagery, or a mix of both, and their visual aspects such as font, shape, and colour, as well as their design elements like complexity, cohesion, and balance, can have a substantial impact on how the target audience responds to them. According to Dass et al. (2014), consumers recognise that slogans are deliberate messaging created by marketers to promote their brands. Based on these examples of elements of brand identity, clearly establishing a brand identity is a strategic and tactical approach to developing an effective brand (Jin et al., 2019).

Methodology

Research Design and Instrument

In this study, qualitative content analysis was conducted to identify the identity of Naelofar's

brand based on the existence of specific words, topics, or concepts from Instagram posts. Through content analysis, the meanings and relationships of specific words, ideas, concepts and images were analysed. The process involved collecting and coding the text, categorising it into manageable code groups, and summarising the findings. The analytical framework drew inspiration from Berger's "Signs in Contemporary Culture: An Introduction to Semiotics" (2014) and Goddard's "The Language of Advertising: Written Text" (2002).

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection is based on the textual and visual items posted on Naelofar's Instagram in the year 2023 (from January-December 2023). The data collection involved a comprehensive examination of Instagram advertisements uploaded on this particular social media platform, spanning from the mentioned duration. The objective of this data collection is to facilitate graphic and linguistic analysis. The graphic components of the Instagram advertisements were captured via screenshots before placing them in a specific folder. The inclusion of both visual material and any associated textual elements, such as captions, was assured throughout the process of capturing the advertisements. The data-gathering techniques were implemented in accordance with the terms of service and standards stipulated by Instagram.

Data Validation

The validation of the advertisement data's reliability was achieved by cross-checking with information obtained from numerous sources, such as Facebook and TikTok.

Results and Discussion

Visual identity

Aesthetic decision

Naelofar's Instagram account showcases a consistent aesthetic that is visually pleasing and on-brand. The balance of the images is well-maintained, with a mix of product shots, lifestyle images and inspirational quotes. The colour palette

is predominantly pastel, with occasional pops of bright colours that add interest and variety. Movement is incorporated through the use of videos and boomerangs, which showcase the products in action. Patterns are used sparingly, with a focus on solid colours and textures. Scale and shape are used to highlight the products, with close-up shots and creative angles that showcase the details of the hijabs and bags.

Ambiance

Naelofar exudes a positive and empowering ambiance that resonates with its target audience. The mood is upbeat and modern, reflecting the brand's commitment to promoting modest fashion and female empowerment (How did Neelofa build her fashion empire, 2022). The character of the brand shines through in the inspirational quotes, product shots, and lifestyle images, showcasing the confidence and excitement that come with wearing Naelofar products. The quality of the content is high, with a focus on visually appealing and well-composed shots that highlight the brand's products and values (Jasman et al., 2022). The tone of the captions and posts is inclusive and uplifting, fostering a sense of community and shared purpose among the brand's followers (How did Neelofa build her fashion empire, 2022).

Figure 1: The Orchard (Naelofar, 2023, October 31). Image source:https://www.instagram.com/p/CzDQqkNPyxQ

Attention-seeking Device

Naelofar's Instagram employs attention-grabbing techniques, including striking visuals and intertextuality, to captivate its audience and communicate the brand's identity. The account showcases visually appealing images of hijab products, highlighting distinctive designs and quality materials. Intertextuality is woven through quotes and lifestyle images that resonate with the target audience. Through these techniques, Naelofar successfully captures the attention of potential customers, inviting them to delve deeper into the brand and enhancing the likelihood of conversions.

Camera Shots

A variety of camera shots are used in Naelofar's content strategy. Close-up shots focus on the intricate details and textures of hijabs and bags, emphasising the premium quality of the products. Wide shots provide a broader view, capturing the overall design and style within the brand's aesthetic. Lifestyle images showcase the products in real-life settings, illustrating how they can be styled for a cohesive and fashionable look. Product shots against a plain background highlight individual beauty and uniqueness. Videos demonstrate styling techniques that offer a dynamic visual experience.

Figure 2: Warisan (Naelofar, 2023, April 3).
Image source: https://www.instagram.com/p/Cqjh4w5vrri/

Figures

The portrayal of figures, including models and items, on Naelofar's Instagram account is characterised by a focus on female empowerment, inclusivity, and the promotion of modest fashion. The brand owner and founder, Neelofa, is portrayed as a role model for acting, modeling and advocating for modest fashion, which has helped the brand attract and engage new and younger customers (Naelofar's digital makeover for modest fashion to drive customer engagement, 2022). The models featured in the brand's campaigns and posts reflect the diverse and empowered community that Naelofar aims to inspire, showcasing the brand's commitment to representing women from various backgrounds and cultures. Moreover, celebrities with substantial social media followings (and controversies) including Daniel Danielle and Puteri Sarah have served as models for Naelofar. The presence of these celebrities exhibits the brand's appeal to a younger and digitally connected audience. Notably absent are senior models, with the exception of Neelofa's mother, Datin Noor Kartini Noor Mohamed, an Internet personality and entrepreneur herself who occasionally makes

appearances.

Naelofar's product line focuses on clothing tailored for Muslim women and those who embrace modest fashion. Most collections primarily feature hijabs and headscarves, offering a range from effortless instant hijabs to intricately embroidered shawls and high-end hijabs adorned with crystals, suitable for both casual activities and special functions respectively. The brand extends its modest offerings to include ready-to-wear dresses, *telekungs* and handsocks that cater to average to plus-size women. Theme-based items, like those in the Hello Kitty collection, encompass a variety of items such as bucket hats, cardigans, pleated skirts and pouches designed with a youthful aesthetic to appeal to both younger consumers and adult Hello Kitty fans.

To stay current and maintain consumer appeal, businesses must stay updated on technological advancements, particularly artificial intelligence. Naelofar utilises AI to enhance their marketing imagery. Additionally, the "Orchard" collection's backdrops are crafted using AI and AI-related images of Neelofa are featured in the "Stamplicity" headscarf collection.

Figure 3: Eco Geometric (Naelofar, 2023, June 27). Image source: https://www.instagram.com/reel/Ct-RHxogSiA/

Graphological Features

Graphological features in Naelofar employ impactful fonts, a thoughtfully chosen colour palette, inventive layouts, and captivating imagery with the aim of visually captivating the audience and effectively conveying the brand's message. An instance of this is the consistent use of uppercase mechanics (e.g., 'NEW ARRIVAL', 'COMING SOON' and 'TONIGHT') in post, spotlighting important messages and events from the brand.

Figure 4: Whimsical (Naelofar, 2023, October 11).
Image source: https://www.instagram.com/p/CyPJIKmy3hn/

Paralanguage

Neelofa employs paralanguage, utilising gestures, body posture and eye contact to announce the year-end sale. She excitedly claps her hands and punctuates the announcement with a celebratory fist pump, exclaiming "Yes!" with enthusiastic intonation. Using finger gestures, she encourages her followers to swipe the video for more details, maintaining an excited intonation. Throughout, her body posture remains confident as she gazes at the camera, all while wearing her *niqab*.

Themes

The themes suggested by the collection names offer valuable insights into the design inspirations and concepts that underpin each set of products. Since living beings, especially animals, are prohibited in Islamic design, designers, consequently, seek inspiration from nature, incorporating elements like floral and geometric designs into their creative

pursuits. As a result, many naming of collections are derived from nature and botanical themes, such as "Orchard," "Proteas" (named after a South African flowering plant), "Bamboo Trellis" (inspired by architectural structures made of bamboo used to support climbing plants) and "EasyOn Lily Rosen" (indicating ease of use or simplicity, particularly in the context of instant hijabs).

"Liberte N.9," drawing inspiration from the French words for "freedom" or "liberty," made its debut immediately after Malaysia's Independence Day and Malaysia Day. The designation "N.9" imitated renowned fragrances like Gucci No. 3 or Chanel No. 5. N.9 also significantly refers to the ninth year the business is in operation, while "Warisan Raya" showcases themes inspired by culture and heritage, specifically tied to the Raya celebrations. The collection includes distinct sub-collections named after Malay females such as Mastura, Soraya, Khatijah and Dayang.

Figure 5: Liberte N.9 (Naelofar, 2023, August 29).
Image source: https://www.instagram.com/p/CwgdutbSk4h/

Verbal identity

Buzz words

The use of Gen-Z slang serves as a strategic method to engage with the primary consumers who are within the Gen-Z age range. For example, in a promotional ad stating, "You don't need girl math to tell you to get Dayang (a scarf) now!", "girl math" alludes to a rational and calculated approach employed by girls to justify their shopping expenses. "Slay" in "Slay your hijab game with Hello Kitty x Naelofar!" refers to doing something well or doing a good job. In other ads, terms like FOMO (fear of missing out) and "gatekeep," meaning keeping something for oneself are utilised. According to Tan (2023), brands that incorporate these slangs into their campaigns are effectively building customer loyalty.
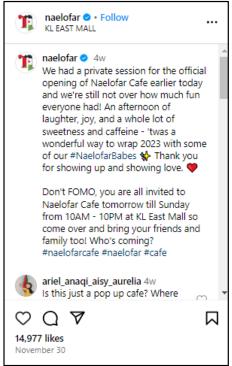

Figure 6: Naelofar Cafe (Naelofar, November 30).
Image source:
https://www.instagram.com/p/C0RoQFQPlc2/

Language Function

The language employed on Naelofar's Instagram account is predominantly English, occasionally interspersed with Malay phrases to celebrate its roots and accompanied by strategically used hashtags. These elements showcase the brand's broad international presence and active engagement with a diverse audience. By leveraging the English language, Naelofar effectively connects with a global audience, extending beyond its Malaysian home base. The intentional use of hashtags, such as "#NaelofarBabes," fosters a sense of community and active participation among the brand's supporters, encouraging them to participate in the brand's narratives and conversations. This approach aligns with the brand's emphasis on consumer involvement and the creation of a global community of empowered women.

Hook Words

The hook words used are "Go Far," "NaelofarBabes" and "empowerment." "Go Far," is used to inspire people to talk about modest fashion and how it can be integrated into their own identity (How did Neelofa build her fashion empire, 2022). The hashtag #NaelofarBabes is used to create a sense of community and engagement among the brand's followers, encouraging them to participate in the brand's narrative and conversations (Naelofar's Digital Makeover for Modest Fashion to Drive Customer Engagement, 2022). Additionally, the brand's messaging emphasises empowerment, encouraging women to feel confident and proud of their fashion choices.
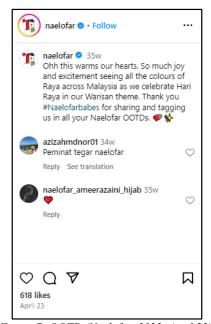
Figure 7: OOTD (Naelofar, 2023, April 23).
Image source: https://www.instagram.com/p/CrXdrrnPfDh/

Linguistic Devices

The use of occasional humour as a linguistic device in Naelofar's content serves multiple purposes. Firstly, it helps create a light and entertaining tone, making the brand's communication more engaging for the audience. By infusing humour, Naelofar adds a relatable and human touch to its content, enhancing the brand's likability and approachability. Additionally, humor can be an effective way to connect with a diverse audience that transcends cultural and linguistic boundaries. It allows the brand to communicate messages in a universally enjoyable manner, fostering a positive and enjoyable experience for its followers. In a video created for this purpose, a humorous query is directed at Siri, Apple's voice-activated personal assistant. The model in the ad asks Siri, "Hey Siri, tomorrow is my boyfriend's birthday. Do you have anything that will make him remember something he will never forget?" and Siri replies, "Break up with him. That is something he will always remember."

Methods Of Describing the Meanings of Words

The brand's Instagram utilises a mix of denotative and connotative meanings to convey the qualities and values associated with its products and mission. Denotative meanings are used to directly describe the features and characteristics of the products, while connotative meanings are employed to evoke emotions and associations linked to the brand's identity and the lifestyle it represents.
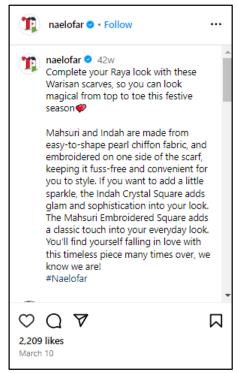
Figure 8: Warisan Collection (Naelofar, 2023, March 10).
Image source: https://www.instagram.com/p/CplzGklvXeq/

Narrator/Narratee

The narrator of Naelofar's Instagram account is primarily the brand itself. The account's content is likely created by the brand's team, led by founder and celebrity Noor Neelofa Mohd Noor, CEO Mohd Aqief Mohd Noor, and COO Noor Nabila Mohd Noor (Unhampered by MCO, Naelofar Refreshes Brand and Pushes on with Retail Plans, 2020). On the other hand, the narratee is the audience who reads the story of Naelofar's Instagram account, its followers and potential customers.

Figure 9: Ayisha telekung (Naelofar, 2023, February 16).
Image source: https://www.instagram.com/p/CotN0Fjvo-3/

Point of View

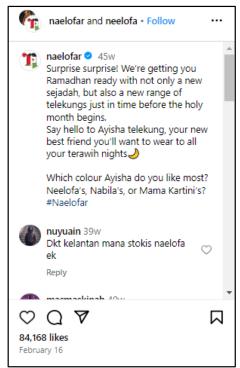By employing "POV" (Point of View) on Instagram, Naelofar is communicating with its audience in a manner that feels personal and relatable. This technique enables the audience to feel as though they are active participants in the brand's story. In the specific instance of "POV: When you get "I dah sampai" text", any girl who has been through this knows she has to expedite her makeup routine, focusing on essential touch-ups and finishing quickly to minimise any potential delays.

Pronoun Used

The text producer/narrator adopts the plural pronoun "we," whereas, the account predominantly employs the second-person pronoun, "you" to communicate with its audience, fostering a sense of inclusive and connection. This strategic use of the pronoun "you," as suggested by Labrecque et al. (2020), is noted for its higher positive impact on consumer engagement actions compared to other pronouns such as "I" and "we." This approach enhances the audience's engagement in the

discourse and contributes to the promotion of the brand identity.

Signs and Symbols

Emojis, which are forms of signs and symbols, are used in many ways on Naelofar's Instagram. They are used to fill in emotional clues that would otherwise be lacking from textual discourse. They add something visible to the brand's way of talking to people, making it more familiar and interesting for them. Emojis can also help show the tone or mood of a message, which makes it more appealing and easy to understand. Common emojis used are 😍 (smiling face with hearts) and ❤️ (red heart). The former suggests approval of something particularly attractive and pleasant, while the latter conveys gratitude, love, hope, and other warm feelings (Cyca, 2022).

Figure 10: Monogram Poppy (Naelofar, 2023, July 31).
Image source: https://www.instagram.com/p/CvW5eoqvrZX/

Varieties of Writing

A semi-formal writing style is used by Naelofar on Instagram to keep things business and friendly. This tone helps the brand get its message across clearly, making it appealing to a wide range of people while still keeping its trustworthiness. This style is flexible and can be used for a wide range of materials, from product details to conversations

with customers. It fits in with the general look of Instagram feeds, which helps create a consistent and well-polished business image and a positive and trustworthy online presence.

Conclusion

From the analysis above, it can be concluded that Naelofar employs a modern and contemporary visual and verbal identity yet complies with its Islamic identity. This resonates well with its clients, who are mostly in the Millenials and Gen X age groups. In today's industry, when there are so many competitors, it is essential to understand every aspect of building a successful brand.

In essence, it can be seen that Naelofar's brand strategy is founded around a coherent and emotionally compelling story, whereby the overarching subject of "go far" serves as a cohesive element across all aspects of the brand. This theme not only unifies the brand but also serves as a source of inspiration for its intended audience of contemporary women. To summarise, Naelofar's advertising approach on Instagram is to cultivate a close and relevant connection between the business and its clients. This is achieved via the use of contemporary language, colloquial expressions, emotive appeals, prioritisation of crucial details, and succinct but powerful product descriptions.

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