



colloquium
isme
Empowering Local Mind in Art Design
& Cultural Heritage
2016

Empowering Local Mind
In Art Design & Cultural Heritage

3rd ISME International Colloquium 2016

proceeding book

27 & 28
December
2016

Universiti
Teknologi MARA,
Melaka, Malaysia.

In collaboration with:





Empowering Local Mind
In Art Design & Cultural Heritage

3rd ISME International Colloquium 2016

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PUBLISHED BY:

Faculty of Art & Design,
UiTM Melaka
KM26 Jalan Lendu,
78000 Alor Gajah, Melaka
Tel : +606 - 5582094/ +6065582190/ +6065582113
Email : ismefssr@gmail.com
Web : <http://isme2016.weebly.com>
ISBN : 978-967-0637-26-6

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The 'Me-Too' Phenomenon in Packaging Design: A Case Study of Malaysian Retail Products

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Abstract - This research is conducted to identify design elements that contribute towards visual similarities in the packaging of retail products and the effects on consumer's buying decision. A mixed method approach was employed through this study which is quantitative and qualitative methods. Visual analysis was conducted to analyze visual similarities. Three types of product packaging with six different brands has been analyzed. The survey was carried out to one hundred consumers for the data collection. From the findings, color is indicated as the main design element that contributes towards visual similarity followed by graphic layout, and main illustration or photography of the packaging design. The findings also suggest that most of the consumers agreed that there are visual similarities between the leading product and the 'Me-Too' packaging design. Therefore, most of the consumers will verify the brand before buying and some of them prefer to select cheaper product; which means the 'Me-Too' product. Finally, it can be concluded that retail products need to be distinctive and unique in order to capture consumer's attention and this is possible by highlighting important design elements on the packaging design. Color coded products are effective in creating strong competition on the shelf and leading brands need to be advance in packaging design in ensuring their loyal consumers will not be diverting towards 'Me-Too' products.

Author Keywords: *Visual Similarity; Packaging Design; Retail Product; Look Alike*

1. INTRODUCTION

Packaging design has plenty roles to play for every product and brands in the market. Mainly, packaging or the root word 'pack' function as a container, carrier, protector, the main medium presentation of information [1]. Packaging is also the first door that lead consumer to stop and start to observe, to see, to read or the know more on new products on the supermarket shelves. In marketing, packaging is significant to strengthen brand awareness, influence buying decision, establish brand image by delivering functional, symbolic and experiential benefit to the target audience [2]. Taking this to the advantage, new products used the 'Me-Too' packaging strategy to boost their sales and to capitalize allocation of market share owned by some leading brands [3].

As impulsive buying decision among consumer, the appearance of product is important as the price tag, size, ingredients and halal logo especially for Muslim consumer in selecting food products. Therefore, packaging design can be considered as first impression to consumers in trusting the brand rather than its' competitors. Competing in the aggressive retail marketplace, packaging design plays important role in consumer's buying decision [2]. Consumer's demand of buying established product and strong recall of brand image has created a scenario that develops 'Me-too' products to compete in the market place [4].

1.1 *'Me-Too' Packaging*

'Me-Too' product is a term given to product which is mimicking the total image of leading brand that stands on the same line on the shelf. They are several terms used to represent 'Me-Too' products such as lookalike, copy-cat, mimic, imitation, and many more. Despite of looking unintelligent for not having uniqueness and niche brand image, visual similarities in 'Me-Too' packaging design are meant to divert the attention of consumers; to divide purchasing possibilities and to take certain portion of the market share. According to [5], lookalikes are not accidentally born but they were intentionally created to take the advantage or 'free-riding' on the establishment developed by the leading brands. In contrast with that, consumers reacted negatively to the 'Me-Too' products which directly copy the identity and for having strong similarities with the leading brands [6].

1.2 *Elements of Packaging*

According to [7], it is suggested that the usage of different design elements able to twist the total look and position of products. Another study showed that visual components are more effective in influencing consumers by the attributes of shape, typography, pictures, material, quality and color [2]. [8] had suggested that all those attributes can be considered as two categories; visual and informational elements. Visual elements are including graphic, color, placement, packaging size and shape while informational elements were product information and technology images (refer Figure 1.0). These elements are crucial in consumer buying decision because of their influences on choosing, getting attracted, like

and purchase the product [2].

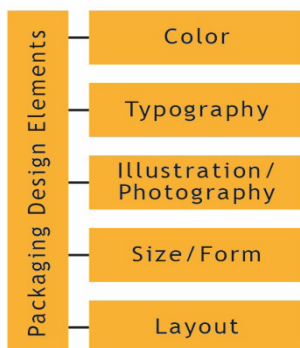


Figure 1.0: The Visual Elements of Packaging Design.

In Malaysia, Fast-Moving-Consumer-Goods (FMCG) products keep on showing visual similarities to the packaging of the well-known, leading brands. However, there are limited studies on 'Me-Too' packaging design in Malaysia and its influence on consumer related to food products. With almost no difference in the eye of consumers, these similarities have been creating issues and confusions that might cause to mislead buying decision [4][9]. Leading brands will be effected badly caused the likelihood of brand confusion and the positive evaluation of lookalikes [10]. The 'Me-Too' issue has been rising in UK, even discussed in Bangladesh; the worries of 'free-riding' has become a serious matter and the significant role played in this confusion is the packaging design. Therefore, this study is conducted to identify design elements in 'Me-Too' packaging design in selected brands that contribute towards visual similarities and its' effects to consumer's buying decision.

2. METHODS

To achieve two research questions that have been mentioned before, both qualitative and quantitative approaches is used including visual analysis and surveys towards three products with six different brands; Oreo Biscuit and Cream-O Biscuit, Faiza Basmathi Rice and Faiz Basmathi Rice, and ESB Lychee and Penguin Lychee (refer Table 2.0). The visual analysis and surveys will look into five important elements on the packaging design including color, typography, size or form, illustration or photography and graphic design layout which might

influence consumer buying decision power. Those product brands were paired-up based on their visual similarities on its packaging design whereby one of it can be considered as a leading brand to the other.

Table 2.0: The Approach and Technique to Meet Research Question.

Research Question	Approach and Technique
What are the design elements in 'Me-Too' packaging that contribute to visual similarity?	1. Visual analysis on color, typography, size/ form, illustration/ photography, graphic design layout
How does a visual similarity on packaging design can influence consumer's buying decision?	2. Survey Question; No. 7: <i>Setelah anda mendapati terdapat persamaan pada pembungkusan produk, apa yang anda lakukan?</i>

For visual analysis, all these packaging design are systematically studied based on their visual appearance mainly on authenticity, clarity and simplicity and shelf impact [11]. Visual similarities on five important elements will be analyzed concurrently with the visual appearance to explain the suggestive existence of visual similarities on these packaging designs. The qualitative approach has been viewed using criteria suggested by [12] with confirmability criteria for preference of objectivity. A confirmability criterion is triangulation to reduce the effect of analyzing bias and admission of researcher's belief and assumptions [13]. This criterion was purposely chosen to ensure the findings from visual analysis are reliable and valid within the natural setting. The focus of this research based on three types of packaging products; packet-type biscuits, packet-type rice and canned fruits. The suggestive results do not represent other types of packaging design and brands because of the physical and materials differences. [14] stated that it is difficult to replicate findings using qualitative approaches which take place in natural setting for different environment. However, [15] has mentioned generalizability as one of criteria for quality case studies that can be refers to similar types of packaging design for different brands. The findings also delimit the issue regarding the argument of plagiarism because there no present of copyright infringement claim from leading brands towards the particular brand's packaging design.

The quantitative approach is used for this research, which requires information and data in the form of figures that can be measured. This research was conducted using online survey to 100 target respondents from various demographic backgrounds. In order to achieve getting genuine feedback from respondents, descriptive quantitative research does not impose any treatment of the respondents and is measured only once. Descriptive research can provide findings that shaped the norm rather than the standard ones. Therefore, this approach is used to get the latest scenario from respondents about the experience they faced in groceries shopping and to get direct feedback of their reaction towards the 'Me-Too' packaging design on the current market.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Visual Analysis

In general, Oreo and Cream-O packaging has quite similar features but there are significant differences when looking into the details (refer Figure 3.1.1). Both of these packaging used blue color but Cream-O appeared to be darker compared to the leading brand, Oreo. White lettering with arched position were applied for product name but Oreo which are using All-Caps, San-Serif typeface seems to be contradict with Cream-O's Title Case, Script typeface. The subject of photography were also similar, but Cream-O added milk splash and this has added the gap of similarities. The size of the package also differ, Oreo has longer width while Cream-O chose to be shorter in width with taller in height. It is obvious that the element of layout that helps Cream-O to be seen nearly as Oreo. The placement of the product name, photography, brand logo and background graphics were positioned similarly; which made it look alike.



Figure 3.1.1: Oreo Biscuit (left) and Cream-O Biscuit (right).

Secondly, Mughal Faiz Rice's packaging shows very close similarities to the packaging of Moghul Faiza Rice, the leading brand (refer Figure 3.1.2). The combination colours used in both packaging almost looked as the same especially for the colour blue, red and orange. Light yellow coloured triangle shapes showed some contrast for Faiza Rice's packaging, which are not applied on Faiz Rice's packaging. As for typography, both are using Serif typeface for the product name. The arrangement and placement is also identical by using 'Justified Width' and aligned to left. Faiz Rice's packaging also packed in the same size and shape plastic sack, the same height, with the same coloured rope for customers to hold. There is no illustration or photography for both packaging, but patterns, ornaments and typography layout played as the main visual for these packaging. In spite of these similarities, there are slight differences at the bottom part of these packaging. The ornaments were placed heavily for Faiz's packaging while Faiza's packaging were occupied with addresses, logos and quality marks. Overall, Mughal Faiz Rice's packaging shows strong similarities to Moghul Faiza Rice in every stated design elements; consumers who might be in hurry may overlooked the differences and tend to purchase wrongly.



Figure 3.1.2: Faiza Rice (left), and Faiz Rice (right).

ESB Lychee and Penguin Lychee displayed significant similarities with every stated design element checked (refer Figure 3.1.3). Obviously, they are using the same colour pallet which is red, yellow and green. The lychee fruits for both label were illustrated with almost similar style, composition and detailing. The same decorative geometric pattern was applied at the top and bottom of both label; and the exact size of can contributed more factors to the visual similarities. Slanting white lettering with different degree of height were applied for the product name. Layout and placement of design elements were identical whereby illustration, logo, and typography were centre-aligned in the middle of the front label. The only feature left to differentiate these two lookalike packaging is the brand logo. ESB appeared in word mark form compared to the Penguin's icon in circle shape.



Figure 3.1.3: ESB Lychee (left), and Penguin Lychee (right).

The bar chart below shows the data from 100 respondents in determining the main design element that contributes to visual similarities for Oreo Biscuit and Cream-O Biscuit. 88% of respondents agreed that same Colour Combination is the main factor in the confusion between Me Too and leading brand. It is followed by Graphic Layout (63%) and Illustration/Photography (60%) design elements. Some respondents seem to be aware of the differences in the design by stating lower number for Typography (37%), Shape and Size (31%) and Others (2%) (refer Figure 3.2.1).

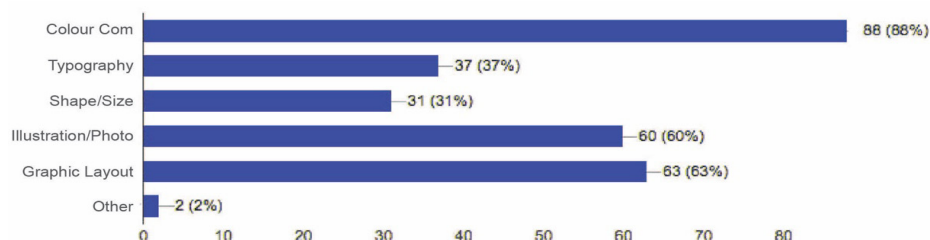


Figure 3.2.1: Visual Similarities on Oreo Biscuit and Cream-O Biscuit.

Secondly, the bar indicates the result for the survey done for product Faiza Rice and Faiz Rice. All respondents (100%) agreed that Colour Combination is the leading factor to visual similarities and followed by secondly higher voted; the element of Typography (83%). The element of Graphic Layout (76%) has almost the same percentage to Shape & Size element (75%). The usage of patterns and ornaments instead of illustration/photography in these both packaging has resulted lower respondents' vote for Illustration/Photography design element (65%), and followed by Others (2%) (refer Figure 3.2.2).

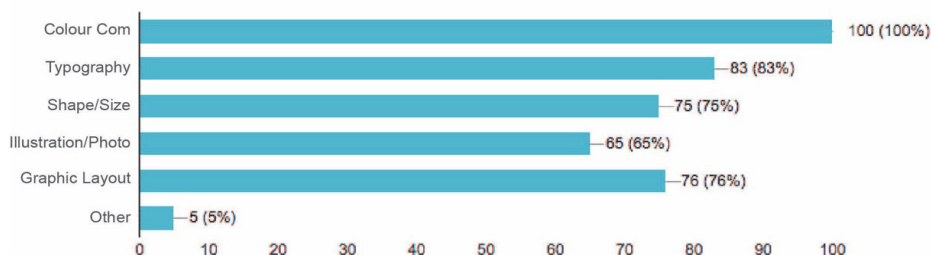


Figure 3.2.2: Visual Similarities on Faiz Rice and Faiza Rice.

The final bar chart illustrates responses on the third case study which involving the packaging of ESB Lychee and Penguin Lychee (refer Figure 3.2.3). The element of Colour Combination has again become the main contributing factor in visual similarities with high percentage (95%) and followed by the element of Illustration/Photography by 80%. The element of Shape/Size and Graphic Layout strongly support and contribute to the lookalike packaging by 73% and 71% accordingly. Less than half respondents (44%) considered that the element of typography helps in creating the same look for both products.

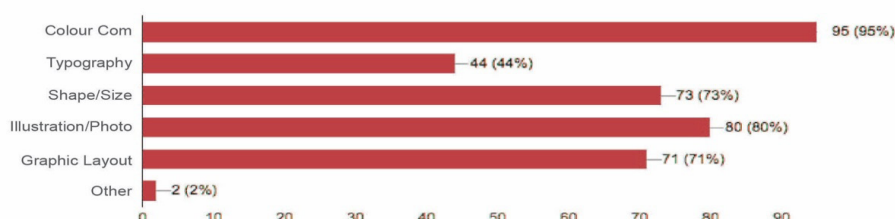


Figure 3.2.3: Visual Similarities on ESB Lychee and Penguin Lychee.

In answering research question one, the element of Colour Combination is the highest percentage voted by respondents compared to the other four design elements which are Typography, Shape and Size, Illustration/Photography and Graphic Layout. Referring to the visual analysis and survey on mentioned three case studies, it is concluded that colour combination is the main element to be considered in avoiding lookalike packaging. The element of layout in the case study also played significant role in contributing towards lookalike, followed by the element of Illustration/ Photography. Faiza Rice and Faiz Rice have shown remarkable percentage of similarities; while ESB & Penguin Lychee has strong similarities among their packaging. However, Oreo Biscuit and Cream-O Biscuit remain to have similarities but the percentage of all elements are lower than both rice and lychee product.

Second research question raised the issue of the influence of consumer's buying decision after realizing that there are visual similarities among the products. Majority of respondents (57%) stated that they will reconfirm the original product if they found similarities between the leading brand and the 'Me Too' product. This shows that consumers are aware of the 'Me Too' product and not jumping to buying instantly. However, 27% respondents will directly purchase the cheaper product; in this case the 'Me Too' product always appears with cheaper price compared to the leading brand. Therefore, the strategy of 'free-riding' has worked on consumers who are buying impulsively without checking. 14% of the

respondents gave open answers, and most of the responds is to check all the information on the packaging including quality marks, Halal marks and endorsed by the Ministry of Health Malaysia (refer Figure 3.2.4).

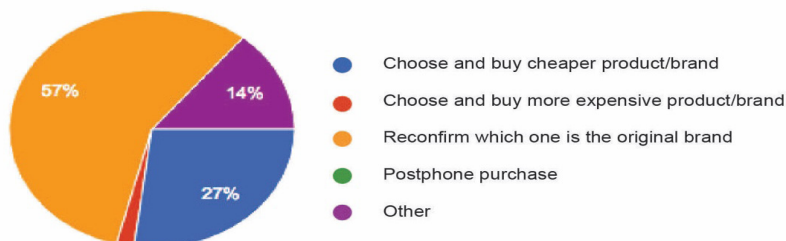


Figure 3.2.4: Consumer buying decision on 'Me-Too' packaging.

4. CONCLUSION

Visual similarities on 'Me-Too' packaging can be considered influential towards consumer buying decision. Most of consumer felt that color combination is the major elements that contribute to the visual similarities on 'Me-Too' packaging, followed by graphic layout and illustration/ photography. Even though majorities' consumer agreed that visual elements on 'Me-Too' packaging can confuse them, they insisted that it did not give much trouble in finding the leading brands product as they had preferred. Unfortunately, the 'Me-Too' packaging phenomenon is undeniably becoming frequent among brand to brand. This should be taken seriously among manufacturers as well as consumer. Most of the time, new brands trying to emulate instead of innovate their own brand identity because of no strict action from particular manufacturer of brands' packaging that had been copied. Consumer also should take part to curb this phenomenon by reporting to relevant authorities for this matter. [16] stated based on several legal cases, legal experts have mentioned that a brand must prove three critical points to attest that packaging has violated trade dress;

- (i) Consumer can associate the packaging with the leading brand's product;
- (ii) Consumer confuse about the packaging, to express similarity between both packaging; and
- (iii) The suspected 'Me-Too' packaging can be recognized and function as indicator to the leading brand's product.

In the meantime, designer from creative agencies should initiate pro-active steps in reducing the case of 'Me Too' packaging design. By doing observation and ground study, designers are able to know how to differentiate and divert attention by setting different colour combination or any design elements in their design proposal to compete with other products. Designers should also increase the originality of design and educate their clients about how to use creative design as a strategy; but not to commit infringement or 'free-riding' on leading brands.

Therefore, all parties including government authorities should aggressively counter this threat because most of the cases the leading brand's product has reliable evidence to claim trade dress infringement toward 'Me-Too' packaging products.

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