

Identifying Common Confusing Visual Elements On Packaging Design Of Canned Alcoholic Beverages In Malaysia

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Abstract

This research paper aims to define the confusing elements on alcoholic canned beverages and create a new visual sign to help the Muslim consumers in recognizing canned alcoholic beverages effectively. This research paper will examine the design elements on canned alcoholic packaging that may cause confusion to Muslim consumers. Based on a visual analysis of the said elements, a Haram logo was developed to enhance the contrasting designs between canned alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages. The outcome of this research paper purposely will be transformed into a new and clearer visual sign for canned alcoholic beverages that are currently available to help Muslim consumers differentiating between the canned alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages.

Keywords: Visual Analysis, Canned Alcoholic Beverages, Packaging Design, Muslim Consumers

1. Introduction

Islam is the official religion in Malaysia and alcoholic beverages are illegal and their consumption among Muslims is prohibited (WHO, 2004). Alcoholic beverages are also not advertised in any print media mostly read by Muslims, but it is permissible to non-Muslim customers such as Chinese and Indians. In a Muslim-majority Malaysia, the confusion over canned alcoholic and non-alcoholic canned beverages is a big issue because it involves religious sensitivity in the matter of Halal and Haram. The enforcement of law against sales of alcoholic beverages is very weak as they are easily available in stores nationwide. Generally, visual design on a packaging is intended to attract users to a product. However, for a Muslim-majority country, confusion over canned alcoholic and non-alcoholic is a serious issue because it involves the sensitivity of Muslim consumers. Article on 15 November 2013 has shown that the occurrence of confusion cases when several store employees admitted they had mistakenly arranged canned fruit drinks with alcohol in the same place (Harian, S. 2013). According to the article, several customers were interested to the alcoholic beverages because of the visual on the packaging design looked like lemon carbonated drink. In another case, a student was caught for trying to bring canned alcoholic drinks into the school. Following the case, the teacher also expressed dissatisfaction because the packaging design was confusing to the teacher and the school. Three days later, Sinar Harian newspaper released another article entitled "*Reka grafik tin minuman keras kelirukan pembeli*" explaining the confusing among Muslim consumers regarding the design on the cans of alcoholic drinks that looked similar to that on the cans of non-alcoholic drinks (Harian, S. 2013). The Consumers Association of Penang (CAP) found that there were more than 15 types of alcoholic drinks in the market that looked like non-alcoholic drinks which created confusion among the general public (Metro, H. 2010). According to the president, SM Mohamed Idris, manufacturers used attractive colour, which certainly influenced consumers, especially children and teenagers who would buy the alcoholic beverages.

The same incidents occurred in 1997, where Alcopops or alcoholic lemonade soft drinks were sold in Malaysia in attractive, colorful, and easy to remember name (Ardiah Jamali et al. 2009). When alcoholic beverages and soft drinks mixed in the same placement, consumers will often rely on the visual elements on the cans to distinguish between alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks. However, there is no clear visual element on the cans alcoholic drinks that can help the consumer to make the much needed differentiation of the two drinks. The word 'arak' on the cans of alcoholic drinks too small and the manufacturers should be more concerned about

this because it may cause Muslim consumers to make the wrong purchasing decision (Harian, S. 2013). According to Dr. Siti Mariah Mahmud (Mahmud, D. S. 2010), not many studies have been done on the issue of alcoholic beverages because it is a sensitive subject among many Malay Muslims.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Elements of Packaging

There are many different opinions on the classification of packaging elements in the scientific literature. All the information on the packaging should be clear because the communication can be done through the design of packaging, both directly or indirectly. Direct communication describes the product, its advantages and ways to use it while indirect communication uses colour, shape, design, and texture to convey the message and the concept of a product such as originality, excitement, luxury, masculinity or femininity (Gutierrez, B. P. 2001).

Based on a review of the literature in this field, the researcher concluded that there are two types of elements identified on packaging design namely, visual and verbal elements. Reading analysis classifies graphics, colour, size, shape, and material as visual elements, while information product, manufacturer, country of origin, and brand, as verbal elements.

2.2 Packaging as a Communication Tool

The communicative function of packaging can be discussed in four ways. Firstly, the packaging of products attracts users through the design and use of attractive colours. Secondly, the packaging gives information about the product's contents. Thirdly, the packaging can be a tool to educate consumers and lastly, packaging represents the entire image of a brand (Gutierrez, B. P. 2001). Each packaging elements plays an important role in the consumer decision-making process. In the behaviour purchase stage, the packaging elements inform consumers how to use the product properly, influence the consumers to evaluate the quality of product, and help the consumer to recognize the product for their next repeated purchase (Vitalija Butkeviciene et al. 2008).

2.3 Halal and Haram

In English, the word Halal, as translated by Hussaini (1993), means permitted, allowed, and lawful. Webr (1980) interprets Halal as legal, licit, and legitimate. Halal is the terminology of fiqh knowledge to determine the

status of case. Halal means anything that is not prohibited or something that is permissible by Islamic law.

According to public opinion, Dr. Saadan Man (2014) has categorized the Halal concept in basic life understanding into three parts, which is:

- For Muslims, the Halal concept is a religious order that requires a person to eat and drink what is permitted by God.
- For non-Muslims, the Halal concept is to give them understanding that Muslims are forbidden to eat foods and drinks classified as unclean as pork and alcoholic beverages.
- To food and beverage industry, Halal food is the food that does not contain pork or alcohol when labelled and marketed, as well as benefitting the economy.

The “Haram” word is the opposite of the word Halal, which means forbidden and sinful (Dr. Saadan Man & Zainal Abidin Yahya. 2014). In the context of beverage products, all type of drinks can be consumed except for those that are poisonous, intoxicating, harmful to health, and mixed with unclean objects (JAKIM. 2011). In Islam, alcohol is regarded as the mother of all evil, and its prohibition is clearly stated in the Quran (Jasri Jamal & Noryati Anuar. 2012).

2.4 Alcohol Labelling

All alcoholic beverages products sold in the local market must have alcohol content labelling applied on the main display panel with the phrase “ARAK MENGANDUNGI _% ALKOHOL” typed in sans serif 12 pitch font as shown on Figure 1 below.



Fig. 1. Alcohol content labelling for local beer product.

However, the researcher found that the labelling was common in the cans of locally produced alcoholic beverages. There was no standard alcohol content labelling on the packaging of imported alcoholic beverage products. The researcher also found that the alcohol label is was too small and confused the most consumers. The differences in terms of font size and labelling placement may cause further problems for consumers (see Figure 2).

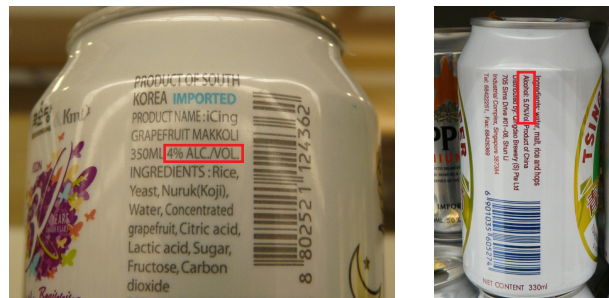


Fig. 2. Alcohol content labelling for imported canned beer.

3. Research Methodology

This research paper employs mixed methods in analysing the data to achieve the research objectives. Qualitative and quantitative research methods were chosen to obtain the results from two different data sources. According to Creswell (2003), mixed methods can be used to understand a research problem. Creswell also mentioned that the use of mixed methods is better, as it allows researchers to get a more detailed perspective on the issue or subject under study.

4. Research Design

A design of research is important because it can help researchers to plan the research process based on the research question (Lang, G. & Heiss, G. D. 1998). This research paper seeks to analyse the visual elements on the packaging of canned alcoholic that have caused confusion among consumers who purchase canned drinks. Once the elements have been identified, the researcher will then create a new visual sign that can help consumers to differentiate canned alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks more easily and accurately. Figure 3 provides a clearer view the process involved in the research.

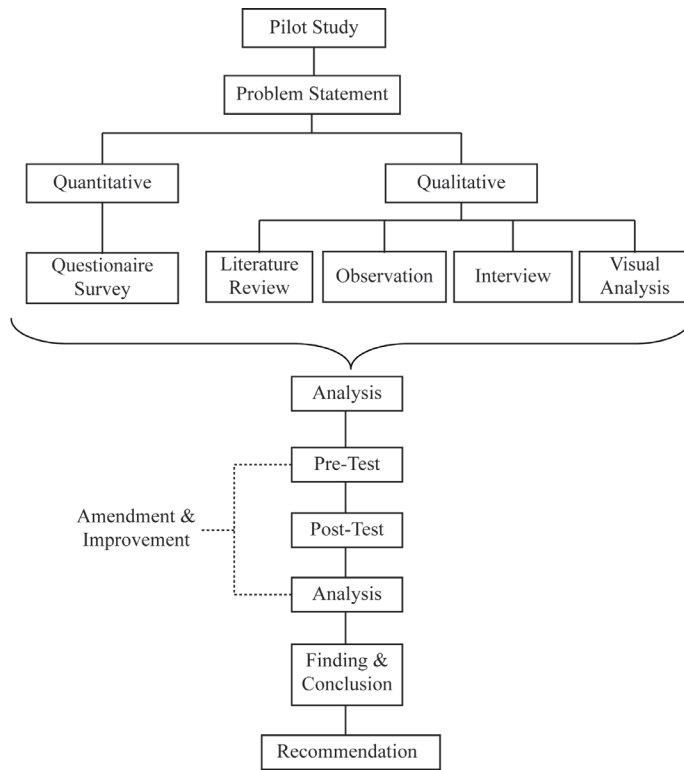


Fig. 3. Research framework

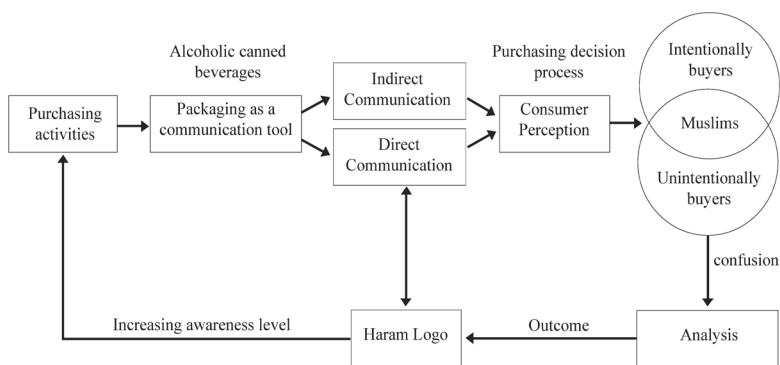


Fig. 4. Conceptual framework

The researcher used three general stages of the research process as suggested by Ian Noble and Russel Bestly (2011) investigation, information gathering and transformation of design (see Figure 5) . In the first stage, the researcher conducted a pilot study and a review of the literature in this field.

In the second stage, the researcher analysed the collected data using the triangulation process for qualitative data as shown in Figure 4. The data triangulation process multiple sources of evidence in a research. The use of multiple sources of evidence in case studies allows a researcher to discover a broader range of historical, attitudinal, and behavioural issues. The proper use of variety data sources can help researchers to deal with the difficulties in proving the validity and reliability of a study (Yin, R. K. 2009). In this research, all the collected data from archival, quantitative and qualitative methods will be compared, integrated, and interpreted to get the correlation results.

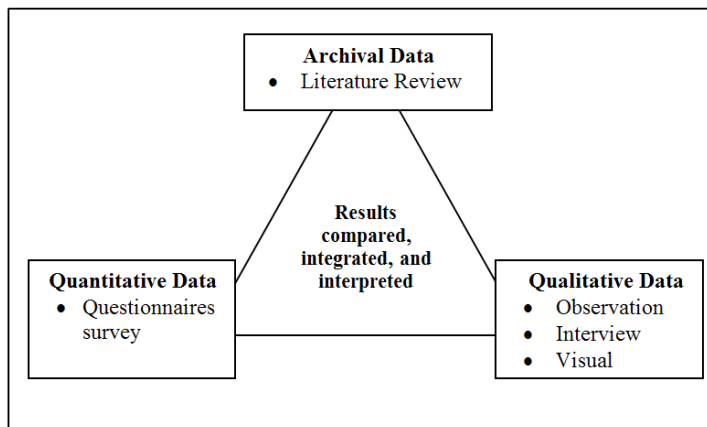


Fig. 5. Triangulation data

In the Stage 3, the researcher conducted pre-test and post-test of the design to get the research outcome. This stage comprises two tests in which the proposed designs will be tested for their acceptance by their target population. The design will be tested through a questionnaires survey which was administered to a purposive sample of respondents. 50 questionnaires will be distributed for each level to the Muslims, aged 18 and above, and those walked past alcoholic beverages section in Jusco shopping centre at Bukit Raja, Klang.

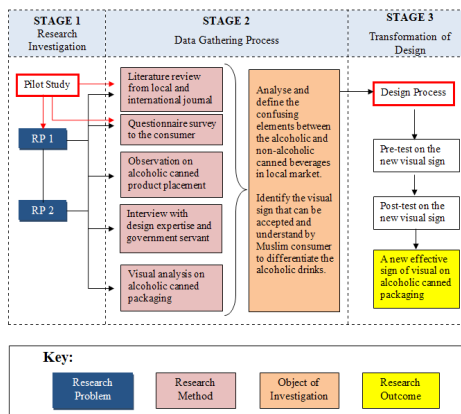


Fig. 6. Research plan

5. Data Analysis

This section explains the analysis of data using the data triangulation process.

5.1 Pilot Studies

Pilot studies have proved that Muslim consumers in Malaysia, especially in the Klang and Shah Alam were confused about the visual design elements of the canned beverages and failed to differentiate between alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks. This issue had led to the accidentally bought of beer cases and it was seen as a serious problem to the majority of Muslim in Malaysia.

5.2 Direct Observation

Through direct observation, the researcher gained a better understanding of actual situation. The researcher visited grocery stores, 24hours mart and supermarkets around the Klang and Shah Alam to see the alcoholic beverages placement conducted. The researcher found that the supermarkets and 24hours mart used systematic and separated placement for alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks. Almost all shop owners who sell alcoholic beverages are non-Muslims. The researcher also found that some 'doubtful' non-alcoholic drinks on the Halal status with no Halal logo displayed on the packaging. One particular non-alcoholic drink was a malt beverage called Malta that had no Halal logo, but displayed the term 'Alcohol Free' in different placement.

5.3 Interview

The interview was conducted with the people in the field, namely, an expert in the packaging design, a researcher of alcoholic beverages, and government officials for enforcement of laws regulating the sale of alcoholic beverages in Malaysia. Three respondents were interviewed with face-to-face interview with the same set question, while one respondent from Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) interviewed through phone using different set of question. Different set of questions been used for this non-structured interviews because the interview go in-depth based on respondent's expert and field.

All respondents admitted the existence of consumer's confusion over the packaging design for canned beverages which were either marketed through newspaper advertising or the internet. However, there was no proper complaint made by members of the public regarding to the confusion. The researcher also found several weaknesses in the implementation of the current Halal logo. As mentioned by the respondents, imported products are not subjected to use the Malaysian Halal logo. However, some imported products used the Halal logo from recognized overseas Halal certification. To date, there are 73 foreign Halal certification bodies worldwide that are recognized by JAKIM. There are too many types of Halal logos that are available in the local market. In addition, there is no standard size of Halal logo because of the diversity of products and packaging designs.

5.4 Visual Analysis

Through observation, visual images of a set of canned alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages taken from the supermarkets and grocery stores in Klang and Shah Alam was collected and categorized into types of alcoholic beverages and types of cans. Based on the categorization, the researcher found that the majority of canned alcoholic products were from the beer category. The Principal Display Panels (PDP) of the beer cans were analysed to identify the elements that consumers found confusing based on the pilot study.

After the categorization, the researcher analysed on the similar elements on the beer cans such as images, pattern, colour, material, typography and shape. The most similar colour for beer cans is green and the most similar pattern is the circle shape of pattern on the PDP surface of beer cans. The whole of beer cans were made from the same material, which is aluminium. Most of the beer cans used the serif and bold character of typography. Almost all the beer cans were manufactured with standard cylinder shape (325ml – 335ml) rather than the slim cylinder shape (375ml – 500ml).

6. Design Process

This section will discuss the design process of the proposed Haram logo. The design process involves the integration of data in getting the preliminary findings of the research. The process is based on the data gathered from the pilot studies then been tested in pre-test and post-test surveys.

6.1 Integration of Data

Each element is being analysed using the visual analysis method to determine the most dominance and similar elements on beer cans. The data showed that there were five elements that caused confusion among the consumers when the elements not available on a beer can, in terms of pattern, colour, brand, Image, and typography (see Figure 7). The researcher found that the preliminary finding does not help to solve the consumer's confusion for the canned beer without the similar elements on the packaging. Therefore, a pre-test survey is conducted to develop an effective sign on packaging as a direct visual communication to the consumers.



Fig. 7. Preliminary findings (5 steps on how to recognize a canned beer)

6.2 Logo Development

After the data from the pre-test survey been analysed, the researcher

found that the opposite labelling for Halal logo need to be created, which is a Haram logo. The Haram logo was developed based on the respondents' feedback. The manual sketches of the design were transferred into a digital format with several design options. The designs took into consideration basic design principles namely, balance, harmony, contrast, directional movement, rhythm, and the centre of interest to ensure the proposed logo would have high readability and legibility. A post-test survey been conducted to test the effectiveness and the acceptance of consumers towards the new Haram logo on canned alcoholic drinks.

7. Findings

Based on the data collected, the researcher identified several weaknesses in JAKIM's ability to address the confusion among Muslim consumers. The existing Halal logo and alcoholic content were found to be ineffective in helping the Muslim consumers to differentiate between canned alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages.

The preliminary findings of this research clearly described all the confusing elements on alcoholic cans. However, there are no standard designs on the canned packaging that can help the Muslim consumers to recognize the alcoholic cans easily and effectively.

Under these circumstances, the researcher proposed a Haram logo as a new visual sign to be applied on the alcoholic cans. Haram is an opposite term for Halal and majority of Muslim consumers understand this clearly. Thus, guideline for implementations of Haram logo was developed for potential future use.



Fig. 8. The proposed Haram logo

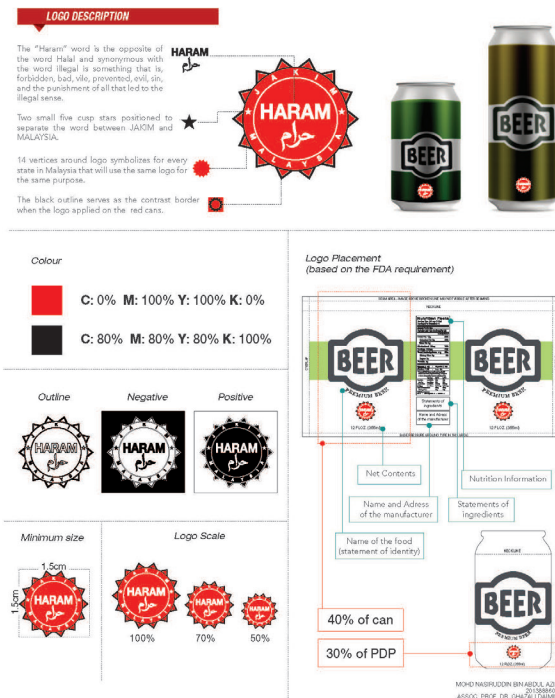


Fig.9. The logo guidelines of Haram Logo

8. Conclusions

This research found that there were five visual design elements namely the pattern, colours, brands, images, and typography that were found to be confusing among Muslim consumers, particularly when it comes to differentiating between canned alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks. The preliminary findings described all similar element on canned alcoholic packaging design but that were found to be ineffective in helping Muslim consumers in distinguishing the two beverages.

After all data been considered, a direct visual communication element which is a new Haram logo been proposed. A pre-test survey conducted during the design process to gather consumer's feedback and asses their acceptance of the logo. To enhance the effectiveness of the logo and elements of the logo, the design elements were created based on the Muslim consumers' feedback. The Haram logo designed by the researcher was proven to be effective after the design was tested and analysed in the post-test survey.

Recommendations

For future research, the researcher recommends to extend the number of subject matter in the visual analysis of alcoholic cans. The conclusions on similar elements of alcoholic cans described in this research are based on the collected beer PDP images from several shops in Klang and Shah Alam area only.

This research has proposed the logo guidelines for the Haram logo placement on alcoholic cans. Future research could be carried out to investigate the Haram logo placement process involving local and imported alcoholic beverages. Future research could also investigate the non-Muslim consumers' acceptance of this Haram logo through in-depth surveys.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest thanks to Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ghazali Daimin, as my supervisor for his guidance, understanding, patience, and lot of valuable information along the process of writing this research paper. I also would like to express my gratitude to all graphic lecturers in Faculty of Art and Design (FSSR) who assisted and guided me on finishing the research and this paper.

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