

Conference Paper

Aesthetic of Cuteness Dimensions in Malang City Mascot

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Abstract

Osi and Ji are Malang City mascots made with coherent design procedures. They represent a particular identity to appeal to the target audience. This paper examines the aesthetics of cuteness that synergize between the dimensions of affection, language, and design in the city's mascot. The study is based on qualitative research with observations and interviews conducted between April and September 2018. The affective dimension of Osi and Ji is linked with their anthropomorphism. It creates a high level of intimacy for the audience. The design dimensions of Osi and Ji are determined by the 'cuteness' design principles, especially the use of basic shapes such as circles, vibrant colors, proportions, and poses. These three dimensions can function as a guide to design a city mascot character to have a strong visual impact.

Keywords: Aesthetic of Cuteness, Character Design, City Mascot

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1. Introduction

Malang City, East Java, Indonesia, is one of the cities in Indonesia which has an official mascot with a coherent process. In October-December 2016, Barenlitbang (planning of research and development division) of Malang City in collaboration with ADGI (Indonesian Graphic Designers Association) Malang Chapter held Malang City mascot design competition [1]. The competition participants are 25 selected designers chosen by their portfolio. The competition stages include registration, participant selection, workshops, design, judging and presentation, announcement, and launching of the mascot. The competition chooses mascot characters design, which contains two characters as one unity. The characters named Osi and Ji. They are a personification of animals that are considered to represent Malang City. Osi is the personification of the Lion, and Ji is the personification of the Manyar Bird [2].

Mascot design acted as a visual representation of the identity that stakeholders want to show to the audience. They functioned as a communicator to the audience by focusing on positive emotions with their cuteness — cute visual appearance widely used in local mascot designs in Japan. Analysis of local mascot design in Japan raises

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several affective words such as cheerful, simple, amiable, humorous, gentle, innocent, cute, gorgeous, carefree [3]. Another opinion states that the cute nature reflected in the emotions of social relationships such as moved, touched, heartwarming, nostalgia, patriotism, team spirit, and feeling God's love [4]. Both opinions provide a correlation that something cute can affect positive emotions on social relationships so that mascots can function as good communicators.

This study will provide a different perspective on the meaning of the word cute in previous studies [5], especially in Indonesia. The purpose of this study is to examine the dimensions of aesthetic of cuteness to better understand the role of mascot design in the cute style through affective dimensions, language dimensions, and design dimensions. This paper will contribute to scientific knowledge of the aesthetic of cuteness, especially its application to mascot designs.

2. Litterature Review

2.1. Aesthetic of Cuteness

Aesthetics is a combination of design elements and design principles. Design elements include lines, shapes, values, colors, sizes, textures, and spaces [6], while the design principles include: balance, rhythm, proportion, dominance, and unity [7]. In its development, aesthetic theory can accommodate perceptions that were emerging from the empathy of the audience. Aesthetic of cuteness that emerged from the baby schema theory 'Kindchenschema' by Konrad Lorenz. That the baby schema on the infant's face does lead to cute perceptions and motivation to care for adults [8]. Furthermore, cuteness also fosters social attitudes, such as communication and friendship [9]. Besides, these attractive traits do not only appear in infants but also in animals such as dogs and cats, or inanimate objects that have human facial features (anthropomorphism).

Several physical characteristics define cute nature, such as aesthetic of smallness, indulgence, and simplicity [10]. Aesthetic of smallness interpreted as a difference in size between subjects and objects. For example, babies are smaller in size than adults, thereby eliminating negative complexity and reinforcing positive responses. Indulgence interpreted as a subject gratification of the object. An example is the feeling of satisfaction when purchasing the desired item. The cute object must have the quality of simplicity in order to accommodate its open interpretations. For example, the shape of a smartphone that becomes simpler over time. In addition to these physical characteristics, there is a dimension in the aesthetic of cuteness that regulates the role of objects

in their surroundings. There are three dimensions in the aesthetic of cuteness, namely: affective dimension, language dimension, and design dimension [11]. The affective dimension in the context of the aesthetics of cuteness suggests that the relationship between subjects and objects of cuteness tends to require anthropomorphism. Anthropomorphism has a higher level of intimacy with the target audience because its attractiveness brings positive feelings like tenderness and affection. For example, Hello Kitty is described as a human, rather than a cat. Hello Kitty has human traits like walks on two legs, wears clothes, and interacts with each other. This embodiment of Hello Kitty will visualize Hello Kitty as an intimate, familiar, and friendly figure.

Cuteness is a system of relationships that depend on objects to communicate something that understood by the audience. At this level, cuteness applies as a universal language. If cuteness is subjective, the word 'cute' will not be understandable by the wider community. Although, in its application, there are several different categories of cuteness, this enriches the aesthetic structure. As mentioned previously, simplicity is the key to the cuteness because, with its innocence, the audience can project their feelings and desires to the character. Cuteness is something that is not 'original', but it is an open-source aesthetic that can be accessed by anyone who wants it. Thus, cuteness is an arbiter symbol that functions as a language.

The design of cuteness has features that working together in signifying cuteness when arranged in such a way to communicate something to the target audience. The design of cute commercial products manipulated so that specific shapes and sensations can be reproduced indefinitely to produce and maintain its charm towards the audience. In this context, cute character design refers to the combination and rearrangement of the arbiter's features, which categorized as being intimate. The intersection of the three domains of affection, language, and design can help to regulate the instability of cuteness.

2.2. Mascot Design

Mascot design is an official character that is deliberately created to represent a certain identity. People in various parts of the world like cute mascots, especially in Japan. Japanese known the mascots as 'yuru-kyara' (weak character) - a term used by artists and academics in the field of character design to signify a mascot for something lacking or incomplete [12]. Because of this, the audience feels more superior to the mascots, so they want to protect them. It mentioned that the 'childlikeness' and 'friendliness'

features would make the mascot as an attractive and effective means of promoting the brand image of the local community.

Japanese society has tendencies to introduce mascots in all situations that might be considered unreasonable or unethical in other countries, like using a cute mascot in the police department or state defense department in Japan. Society outside Japan might consider this to be something that undermines the value of formal concepts. This shocking phenomenon of a mascot in Japan prompts the mascot's ability to be more relaxing and entertaining [13]. Furthermore, it showed that each city in Japan has its mascot. The most famous example is Kumamon, the mascot of Kumamoto Prefecture. The majority of mascots in Japan emphasize 'lightweightness' on their visual appearance to emphasize their cuteness [14]. This concept of lightweightness is fitting to the concept of simplicity in the aesthetic of cuteness theory. Thus, Mascot Design in Japan has utilized the aesthetic of cuteness in its mascot design.

3. Method

This paper uses qualitative research methods with observation and in-depth interviews for data collection. Observation of the Osi and Ji mascot designs is through the Osi and Ji guidebook, which downloaded from the official websites (www.osidanji.com). Observations in April 2018 were carried out to observe Osi and Ji's designs based on character design principles. Then, an in-depth interview, recorded with a smartphone, with the creators of Osi and Ji conducted in September 2018 to find out the designer's perspective on the design of the mascot of Malang and its implications for the community. The interviews become the basis of Analysis in the aesthetic of cuteness Dimensions.

4. Discussions

Osi and Ji created by using the principles of character design, such as silhouettes, basic shapes, proportions, and line of action [15]. The overall visual looks already easy in the eyes because the characters use vibrant green and yellow colors, also solid shading, as it showed in the figure [16, Fig 1].

As explained previously, the aesthetic of cuteness theory has three dimensions that interact with each other: affective dimension, language dimension, and design dimension. The affective dimension of Osi and Ji's character design emanates from its anthropomorphism. Anthropomorphism creates a high level of intimacy with the



Figure 1: Osi and Ji

audience because they can connect themselves to the character's design. As anthropomorphic characters, Osi and Ji use metaphors in their designs. First is the lion symbol. The meaning of the lion symbol is attached to the Malang City since the Hindu-Buddhist era. The proof of this is that many artifacts found in the ancient temples in Malang lead to the symbol of the lion. The second is the manyar bird. Manyar bird is a symbol of Malang City given by the Governor of East Java in 1996. Osi and Ji also borrowing its name from the 'Osob kiwalan' (the reverse language of Malang City). 'Osob Kiwalan' is a distinctive language used in Malang City, where the word reversed in a way, so it became a new language. It is a mixture of several languages from Javanese, Indonesian, Arabic, Madura, and Chinese.

Nowadays, using public figures photos that often found in government agencies' communication media is no longer relevant. A mascot can bring a new approach to the problem because the mascot can communicate messages efficiently to the target audiences. As an example, the celebration of Heroes National Day of Indonesia on November 10 usually communicated with public figures photo using heroic attributes and poses or even worst just a half-body picture with heroism quote. Osi and Ji can communicate the message attractively. For example, Osi and Ji will not feel visually weird as the public figure, when using heroic attributes and poses. Thus, the audience able to connect the characters to himself. Even more, with the cute and approachable nature of Osi and Ji will always be remembered and awaited in every communication media of government agencies in Malang City. When the mascots have become an intimate, familiar, and friendly figure in the minds of the audience, then the communication message can be conveyed more smoothly.

Cuteness is a universal language that is understood by the audiences — for example, the urge of wanting to protect babies and animals who generally have visually attractive and funny characteristics. The aim of Osi and Ji as a city ambassador with a wide range

of target audiences, especially in terms of age, should emphasize more by its cuteness. Cute character designs are the most universally accepted design, unlike cool character designs, which only demanded by adolescences. Cute character designs are appealing to audiences with a lower age range (children). Although cute designs are not suitable for middle age (adolescence) and higher age (adult), they willing to accept it. Furthermore, it has proven in Japan that with the use of cute mascots as representations of cities and government agencies, moral messages conveyed more appropriately.

Osi and Ji, as mascots of Malang City, have been activated since the end of 2016 and can freely be accessed through the official website. All parties are free to use the mascot character design, of course, by holding on to the user manual. Although there are many available poses to use, it is possible to make new poses for activities that not yet represented. With continued use, Osi and Ji can become a symbol of communication in the Malang City area. Technically the character designs of Osi and Ji are made by prioritizing simplicity because excessive detail and ornamentation will quickly tire the eyes. Simple designs also tend to be versatile, so it is efficient for applying to various media, especially on traditional media.

An impression of the cuteness of Osi and Ji arises from the combination of elements and design principles arranged in such a way that it feels suitable. For example, the use of vibrant colors enhances the cute impression on the character design. The audience can quickly see the high saturation in vibrant colors. The proportion also further enhanced the cute impression of Osi and Ji. The same case found in the Disney Princess character design, which lately increasing to resemble children, from the initial size of 8 heads to 6 heads proportion. One of the recent Disney Princess, Moana, whose age in the story is 16 years olds, has a body proportion of 4-year-olds [17]. The changes not only happens to Disney Princess character designs but also occurs in several cartoon character designs, the iconic one is Mickey Mouse.

Mickey Mouse's design has changed a lot since it first appeared. Changes to the visual appearance of Mickey Mouse character design visualize in [18, Fig2].

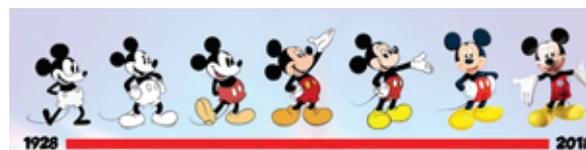


Figure 2: Mickey Mouse Evolution

From the image, the appearance of Mickey Mouse character designs is becoming more children like by the years. These changes include: the legs become shorter and larger, the pants become looser, the volume of his hands and feet enlarged, the head

is larger along with younger facial features [19]. Furthermore, along with these visual changes, Mickey Mouse's personality changed from naughty for the better. This change occurred because Mickey Mouse became more famous so that it became an icon / public figure, so he was expected to behave appropriately.

As a public figure, Osi and Ji's character designs made in such a way by applying visual language so that they can have charming personalities. Although the final design of Osi and Ji have a cute impression, several various alternatives design with another vibe also created to broaden the option. Osi and Ji can be made even cuter like Japanese mascots, but considering the Indonesian audience, it feared that there would be bullying of the mascots because it is considered too inferior. The mascot has a cute but not extreme — the level of cuteness adjusted to the Indonesian audience.

As mentioned before, Osi and Ji have a cute and approachable design. Therefore the visual communication message can be captured efficiently. Malang City mascot deliberately made two figures, Osi and Ji, because these mascots will become communicator for all Malang City government programs. In the future, more than one mascot will be needed to communicate a joint program such as cooperation and collaboration between government division, and there will be no need to create additional character designs. The addition of new character designs like that is quite dangerous for the mascot because it could result in different styles. Different styles will damage the unity of the design, which will later have an impact on disturbances in visual communication.

Osi and Ji, as a visual communication medium, should be versatile to various media. This focused goal achieved in the mascot design concept. They are starting from the use of anthropomorphic characters, simple designs, and explicit poses. Anthropomorphic characters will tend to be more comfortable in the application process, which there are costumes possibilities for the activation process of the mascots. The cute and simple design of Osi and Ji is very approachable for the general public with a broad age range and can be versatile enough for various media, both traditional and digital. Clear poses and gestures will reinforce the cute impression of a character. For example, the Osi and Ji poses are more excessive and expressive than the original references so that the messages carried will be received quickly and effortlessly. All these factors complement each other so that the mascot's function as a medium of visual communication can run smoothly and completely.

5. Conclusion

The three dimensions of aesthetic of cuteness dissect the mascot based on the relationship between subject and object. The affective dimensions of Osi and Ji created from the anthropomorphism of lions and manyar birds, so they have a high level of intimacy with the audience. Osi and Ji's language dimensions created from a cute impression that can be understood by broad audiences. The design dimensions of Osi and Ji observed from the application of its design principles, especially the use of basic circle shapes, vibrant colors, baby proportions, and expressive poses. These three dimensions provide a guide to design cute mascot characters so that their communication process with the audiences can be smooth and precise. Mascots are essential in response to changes in social structure that occur in urban areas, where people increasingly need visual representation in an effort to interact more comfortably [20]. Further studies needed on other mascots of the cities in Indonesia, so this study has a more complex approach on the case study.

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