

# Effect of Narrative with Cross-cultural Innovation as Cultural Heritage Branding Strategy

## *A Case of Indonesian Palembang Songket in the UK Market*

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### ABSTRACT

Cultural heritage preservation has been an issue that is constantly being discussed as it contains a duality of aspects which are economic and cultural perspectives, whereas both perspectives are often seen as contrasting. Commercialisation to the international market is one of the ways to keep economic and cultural aspects of cultural heritage balanced as well as being widely preserved. To be able to achieve its profitability while the product development is limited due to the preservation of certain cultural values, an appropriate and meaningful branding strategy is required. As a part of the resources of its origin country, the branding of cultural heritage will also give effect to its nation branding, whereas the branding concept could be aligned to place branding. One of the approaches that are seen as applicable to place branding is using narrative. The object of this research is to investigate whether the narrative approach as a part of the branding strategy of cultural heritage could affect the international market's brand receptivity. There were two main objectives derived from the research question, which were contributing and related factors to brand receptivity; ideas for brand development, and effects of the narrative. The research is undertaken on Palembang Songket as a traditional textile from Indonesia to be delivered to the UK market. The research was commenced by collecting the secondary data from existing literatures and the primary data was taken in the basis of qualitative and quantitative research and analysis, using an online survey with designated narratives in between the questions, with cross-cultural innovation embedded in the narrative visuals. The influence and effect of prior traits of the consumer on the effect of the narrative are identified. Extension of research regarding the variable and sample size, experiential approach, and concerns towards intellectual property rights issue is expected to be complementary in the future.

**Keywords:** *Narrative, Cross-cultural Innovation, Brand Awareness, Songket Palembang, Cultural Heritage Preservation.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

As a resource from the past that still have demands from the present [3], heritage is essential not only to know a history, but also to determine the future. Preservation has to be accounted when thinking about the concept of heritage, whereas it requires the right purpose, sustainable use, and development [7]. By making a cultural heritage stay preserved and developed, a cultural heritage could stay significant to be the reference in developing the future. Cultural heritage preservation furtherly needs to be viewed from the economic perspective to make it sustainable, and cultural perspective to make it valuable. This research explores a branding strategy using narrative and cross-cultural innovation as the approaches to pursue both its cultural ideals and economic objectives in the preservation process. Market expansion to the international audience is considered to be a suitable case study, using Palembang Songket as the cultural heritage object, and the UK as the sample for the target international audience. Although focused in the preservation and branding of Indonesia's cultural heritage, the result of this study could also be implemented for the future preservation of cultural heritage from other indigenous communities across the world, whose welfare and livelihood majorly depends on it.

## 2. CONTENTS

### ***2.1. Cultural Heritage in Economic and Cultural Perspectives***

The fundamental ways by which economic factors could contribute in a cultural heritage preservation practice is to be the guidance in making decisions, determining policy, encouraging or discouraging the use of heritage, and so on [8]. Economic perspectives will also allow us to have the necessary insights of consumer behaviour, external market analysis, how the market operates, and current market situations in the industry, which will help in determining the strategy of heritage commercialisation. However, although the contributions of the economics are clear, the fact that it relies most on expressing the heritage values in monetary terms makes it insufficient to be the primary or the only factors to consider in heritage conservation.

As a derivative of a certain culture, heritage is inseparable with its concept of sociocultural perspective, including humans and their history [10]. Culture itself could be defined as distinctive social actions. It could include language, body movement,

space and place, sound, material world appropriation, material culture, and all other things that could be the entering points of the observer while 'Heritage' reflects an inheritance that was left from the past [12]. Cultural heritage can also be interpreted as a process of a human condition, in which people are always involved, as the producer and consumer at the same time [7]. Humans as the inventors of cultures are boxed in ranges of groups, may they consist of families and also individuals [12]. Cultural heritage is also said to involve all aspects and elements that are inherited by past human endeavor [13].

### ***2.2. Preservation & Commercialisation of Cultural Heritage***

The combination of economic and cultural perspectives on heritage, furthermore, is resulted in the issues of heritage commercialisation. It is a paradox where cultural heritage is being commercialised to gain revenue as well as promoting the cultural heritage itself that can be a benefit in preserving the heritage but also could be damaging if done inappropriately. "Heritage industry", as mentioned in the previous sections, [7] has now been found similar as the past 's manipulation and misapplication to gain commercial outputs. Therefore, a guideline in heritage commercialisation needs to be applied and involve suitable means of heritage preservation, by considering the traditional values of the people whom the cultural heritage is acquired [14].

### ***2.3. Cultural Heritage as A Brand***

In the marketing context, as defined by American Marketing Association (AMA), a brand is a 'name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competition' [5]. In a broader view, brands are not limited to trademarks and logotype. Instead, a brand is any noun, may it be physical or not [15]. The same applies to culture and its elements, including cultural heritage, may it be tangible or intangible. Connecting the previously discussed concept of heritage, which is any elements from the past that is to be useful in the present, cultural heritage is a national heritage, including substantial objects and intangible virtues [6].

### ***2.4. Narrative for Cultural Heritage Branding Strategy***

As cultural heritage could support the branding of a nation, its branding process is also related to the concept of place branding. A successful brand of a place is said to be when it can be related with the consumers that will use the values, principles and other traits in the brand as a way to reflect their feelings, personalities, and roles [4, 9]. It was further suggested that a nation have to direct its brand by developing narratives that could transfer the values that they want to be related with among their target markets [4].

There are five narratives key characteristics [11], which are: (1) accounts of characters and selective events occurring over time, with a beginning, a middle, and an end; (2) retrospective interpretations of sequential events from a certain point of view; (3) focus on human intention and action—those of the narrator and others; (4) part of the process of constructing identity (the self in relation to others); and (5) coauthored by narrator and audience. Based on these key characteristics, a narrative can be defined as a series of characters and events that occur over time which is interpreted as sequences from a point of view that focus on human intention and action, whereas it is also a part of constructing identity that is written by both the narrator and audience.

The evaluation of narrative approach in branding cultural heritage, furthermore, will be applied to an Indonesian traditional textile called Palembang Songket. With its history and traditional custom of creating to wearing it, a narrative approach will be suitable in marketing Palembang Songket in the global market, in which it has not been widely recognised.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. Participants**

The participants of the study were recruited based on their background as the residents in the UK. Due to the aim of this research, which was to figure out how the narrative approach could fit Palembang Songket to the UK market, whereas the UK market for Palembang Songket has never been analysed, the subjects were not grouped specifically. Therefore, the participants' demographic background varies across the age, occupation, and educational background. The results of this research, however, might show how the participants are demographically categorised, which might be used as one of the basis in analysing the data. There were 17 participants in the research. The questionnaire was distributed

through e-mail, WhatsApp and Facebook messages in the period of August 4th to August 9th 2016. Among 18 responses, one response was found to be irrelevant due to the lack of open-ended questions to be answered, therefore leaving the close-ended questions unexplainable, whereas it did not fit the method aimed for this research. With one irrelevant response discounted it left 17 responses to be analysed.

#### **3.2. Data Collection Technique**

The data was collected through Google Form questionnaires that were distributed via online platforms. The questionnaire consisted of both close-ended and open-ended questions. Since the research question is about finding out the impact of narrative as a branding strategy, the participants were given a narrative to read through. The narrative was divided into three parts, whereas in between them were placed series of questions as well. In short, the questionnaire was divided into four sections of questions, and three sections of narratives. The first section can be called as the pre-test questions, which asked about the participants' demographic background, their interest in traditional textiles, and their familiarity with Indonesian textiles. After that, the participants were required to read the first part of narrative about Palembang Songket. The first post-test questions then asked about the effect of the first part of the narrative to the participants' views on Palembang Songket. The second part of the narrative followed, which explained about English Smocking, and the participants were given similar questions with the ones given after the first part of narrative. The third and final part of the narrative was about the adaptation of English Smocking technique to Palembang Songket as the cross-cultural innovation. Furthermore, the participants needed to finish the final post-test about the effect of the third part of the narrative. They were asked about the whole questionnaire experience and their opinions about branding cultural heritage product in the international market.

#### **3.3. Data Preparation & Analysis**

The close-ended questions in the questionnaire were put for the quantitative analysis, in order to have an empirical view of the results. Most of the close-ended questions used the interval level of measurement [1]. The quantitative data was analysed through the frequency of responses in each questions or category. The analysis started from each question, and afterwards were grouped and compared

according to the themes that will occur in the qualitative analysis.

The data from the open-ended questions was analysed through a method of qualitative data coding, as broken down by [2] which consists of three steps. The first one is Open Coding, whereas in this step the collected data were being run through and organised into certain classifications. The second step is Axial Coding. In this step, the researcher aimed to make connections between each set of data and classifications, the effects and reasoning of the data related to one another. The final step is Selective coding, in which the whole data and its relations were evaluated, and from there, the researcher picked up the key points that were found to be the most relevant to the project.

## **4. FINDINGS**

### ***4.1. Contributing Factors to Brand Receptivity***

Based on the research, the main contributing factors to the participants' brand receptivity are categorized into four factors, which are (1) Prior Knowledge, (2) Associations, (3) Interest, and (4) Relevance. These factors tend to be the participants' existing intrinsic attributes that affect how they value and judge things, and help them determine what kind of products would appeal to them.

#### *4.1.1. Prior Knowledge*

The prior knowledge that was analysed from the participants were their knowledge in traditional textiles from the UK, knowledge relating to the concept of traditional textiles as cultural heritage, and knowledge related to Palembang Songket. The data indicated that the majority of the participants had knowledge about UK traditional textiles, as well as about Indonesia, including the ones who also know about Palembang. Three of the participants explained that knowing about Indonesia is a general knowledge, while most other stated that they learned about it from literature, textiles, TV, and by having Indonesian friends. The majority of the participants also tended to consider traditional textiles as a cultural heritage of the place where it was originated. The participants considered traditional textiles as an aspect of life that is resulted from a region's cultural, historical, and industrial revolution. However, there was also a participant who stated that it could be hard to prove the real origin of a textile, due to its ability to travel as explained by the previous participant, any

culture can adopt any textiles they encountered. And if the textile tradition is being practiced through generations, it will then be a part of their culture.

#### *4.1.2. Associations*

A significant majority (13) of the participants declared that they tended to associate their perception on Indonesia with Palembang Songket after they saw the first part of narrative. Meanwhile, the equal amount of other majority did not tend (7) or were unsure (7) to associate the image of English Smock when they think about England. Relating this result with their prior knowledge as UK citizens, it was assumed that their lack of knowledge about Indonesia and its local culture made it easier for them to associate Indonesia with presumably the only Indonesian culture they had been exposed thoroughly to, which in this case was Palembang Songket. And as UK citizens, they might have been more exposed to varied elements of UK culture before. It then resulted in the participants to have other particular images or culture associations that they found stronger than English Smock when it comes to England's identity.

#### *4.1.3. Interest*

This section will explain about the growth of interests of the participants, as they were being given the narrative. This result showed that most participants (9) tended to have interests in textiles before being given the narrative. Regarding UK textiles, most of the participants (9) tended to be interested in it, however the number of participants who tended to find textiles from other countries as interesting was higher (11).

After being given the first and second part of narrative, most of the participants (11) find Palembang Songket and English Smocking interesting. The level of interest in Palembang Songket then mostly tended to increase after being given the third part of narrative, although the number of participants who stated that their interest was unaffected was quite high (7) as well. The ones whose level of interest increased explained that they were influenced by its innovation's production technique, and that it was inspiring to see traditions evolved and adapted with the material and properties as the basis of the innovation rather than merely the visual. Participant 14 also thought that the cross-culture idea links to the history of Palembang where different cultures met. Participant 16 who had researched about Malay Songket before also added

that the participant’s level of interest increased as the participant felt happy to see other researcher try to save a heritage. Participant 3 said that even though the participant’s level of interest increased, the participant doubted what product could be made out of the innovation since the technique added more bulkiness to the thick Palembang Songket fabric.

On the other hand, the participants who felt their level of interest unaffected by the third part of narrative stated that they see the Palembang Songket fabric remain the same as they dislike English Smock, and that Smocking makes the beautiful Palembang Songket pattern disrupted. Two of them find the narrative and the cross culture combination idea as interesting but they remain uninterested with textiles. From Figure 3 it could also be seen that the participants whose area of employment was Education tended to find their interest more increased than the Student participants.

4.1.4. Relevance

After being given the first part of the narrative, majority of the participants (9) were unsure if Palembang Songket is relevant to the UK market. The participants thought it depends on to whom and how it is marketed, and although it seems unique and luxurious, it doesn’t fit the UK market due to weather and fashion interest difference. Palembang Songket may be accepted by the UK consumers if it is marketed in certain ways such as targeting the Indonesians who live in the UK, marketing it as luxury goods, and creating innovative products that will appeal to the UK consumers.

After being given the third part of the narrative, the level of relevance of Palembang Songket to the UK market according to the participants tended to increase. They see that both traditions were very well combined, creating an unusual new product. Smocking gave a new engaging narrative and a new distinctive aesthetic to Palembang Songket. The innovation also helped both traditions to stay alive. Participant 7 stated that there is always market for new interpretations of traditional product. Nevertheless, they thought the product application will still be restricted and the Asian vibrant colours still does not fit the UK cold and wet climate except for holiday, which could result in a limited duration of success. The participants suggested that it can be more potential if Palembang Songket uses simpler colour ways, such as monochrome. More suggestions regarding applying Palembang Songket in today’s use will further be explored in section 4.2 (Ideas of Modern Applications).

4.2. Ideas for Brand Development



Figure 1. Ideas on how can Palembang Songket enter the UK market based on the UK consumers perspective.

Most participants (10) mentioned specific products to be developed from Palembang Songket. These products then were categorised into clothing, accessories, and furnishing or interior. Participant 5 suggested ways of marketing such as marketing it as a niche product when Asian fashion is trending, and two participants mentioned application purpose such as for decorative and ceremonial use. Other participants gave details on product innovation, including replacing contrasting colours with tone colours in white, use of opaque threads, making of blinds by trapping the fabric in glass, and replacing the metallic threads into coloured ones. Depends on the target market and cost of textiles, fewer motifs on the fabric could also appeal more to the UK market. According to Participant 16 who researched on Malay Songket before, Songket can also be woven using thicker threads that will result in a quicker production and the thicker feature of the cloth could be more suitable for furnishings, as the participant

formerly did in the participant's research. These ideas for product innovation revolved around combining the ethnical feature of Palembang Songket with today's UK market situation and UK consumers' behaviour, which could be the key success factors for the cultural heritage branding if accomplished [6].

### **4.3. Effects of Narrative & Visual Attributes**

The majority of the participants (10) tended to find the series of narrative given had affected their views and awareness both in Palembang Songket and English Smock. The participants found the narrative showed the length of history behind a product, and that the blending of Palembang Songket and English Smock made the story more memorable. Although some other (6) found it unclear if they were affected or not, they explained that even though the story was not compelling enough to make them more interested in and search more about traditional textiles, it gave the participants new knowledge of another world, whereas formerly they never considered and did not have any view of.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS & DISCUSSIONS**

The research showed that the effect towards brand receptivity and awareness among the participants is divided into four factors each. They are prior knowledge, relevance, interest, and associations. The participants tend to show more interests, awareness, as well as engagement to the cultural heritage product after they were exposed to each narrative. The engagement was also seen through the way they give detailed suggestions to the development of the branding strategy over simple statements or information. These suggestions then were grouped into four categories, which were marketing strategy, product innovation, product category, and application purpose. Marketing Strategy is the area with the most suggested ideas, with narrative as a main approach to penetrate the new market. Most participants also expressed concerns about the preservation of the cultural values of the product instead of its physical attributes only.

It will be complementary for this study to be continued in the future with a larger amount of participants to strengthen its validity, as well as to allow more insightful topics to be evaluated. Other sets of research with similar approach and objective using different variables or subjects, such as different cultural heritage product or country of target market are also needed for results comparison. An elaborated version of the narrative, such as the use of motion

graphics, audiovisuals, physical presentation, and other sensory or experiential attributes can also give insightful varieties to the results.

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