

A FOLKLORE NARRATIVE-DRIVEN OF MAT CINCANG DOLL DESIGN

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Abstract

This paper seeks to demonstrate the synergy between local folklore and innovative promotional design strategies that can create a sustainable cultural landscape of Langkawi, Malaysia. Despite the potential of folklore, there are significant gaps in the current promotional products that fail to capture the essence of these stories and their geographical context. Identifying these gaps involves understanding the unique characteristics of the creative economy, which thrives on storytelling, cultural authenticity, and community engagement. Semiotics analyses were done to identify key elements of the story that resonate with both locals and tourists. The character's traits, such as bravery, wisdom, and connection to the natural landscape, were emphasized to ensure that the doll reflects the cultural significance of the legend. The design of the doll incorporated traditional attire and integrating audio technology features that are representative of the local culture, making it visually appealing and culturally authentic and allows it to narrate the story of Mat Chincang and share interesting facts about Langkawi's geography and heritage. The development of the Mat Chincang talking doll as a rich cultural heritage of Langkawi promotional product is a strategic initiative that combines cultural storytelling, interactive technology, and community engagement.

Key words: innovative promotional design strategies, Mat Chincang local folklore, semiotics

INTRODUCTION

Langkawi is the land of myth and legends. It's beautiful natural landscape and attractions come with stories of mythical beings and magic. Today as an UNESCO Global Geopark, Langkawi has bio-geo stories to tell (<https://www.naturallylangkawi.my>) Langkawi was rich with various legends and mythologies, which can be categorized into different types. Some involve supernatural elements, blending imagination and mysticism that transcend reality. Additionally, there are numerous tales about strange creatures, as well as stories related to the natural formation of caves, hills, and mountains. These mythical and natural phenomena form the historical background of Langkawi. (Windsted, 1936)

The legends of Langkawi Island are deeply intertwined with its natural landscape, particularly through stories linked to supernatural occurrences and remarkable natural formations. Among these are the tales of Gedembai and Telaga Tujuh (Seven Wells), both of which are considered extraordinary phenomena. Gedembai, a figure believed to possess supernatural powers, was said to have the ability to transform objects and beings. The Seven Wells, on the other hand, is a legendary site where fairies were believed to bathe. (Azhari; 1995; Ismail, 2000; Halimi 2006)

In addition to these mystical narratives, Langkawi's folklore also includes legendary creatures such as Garuda, a massive mythical bird, and Buaya Putih, a white crocodile that symbolizes power and mystery. The island's caves are similarly steeped in legend. For example, Gua Langsuir (Cave of the Sirens), Gua Bukit Putih (White Hill Cave), and Gua Cerita (Cave of Stories) are all said to be sites of strange and otherworldly events, each with its own unique mythology. Beyond the legends tied to strange occurrences, animals, and caves, there are also myths centered on human figures, believed to be directly connected to the formation of Langkawi's hills and mountains. The stories of Mat Raya, Mat Cincang, and Mat Sawak are particularly significant, as they are linked to the creation of prominent geographical features such as Gunung Raya (Raya Mountain), Gunung Cincang (Cincang Mountain), and Gunung Sawak (Sawak Mountain). Additionally, two notable legends

stand out in Langkawi's historical and cultural memory. The first is the Makam Ajaib (The Magical Tomb), which tells of the extraordinary powers of Tun Jana Khatib, a figure renowned for his greatness. The second is the legend of Mahsuri, arguably Langkawi's most famous tale. Mahsuri was a woman wrongfully accused of adultery and executed, but according to legend, her curse on the island lasted for seven generations. (Wan Soloh, 1977; Augustin, 1977) From the legends discussed, two distinct sets of values emerge which is the positive and negative. The positive qualities embodied by certain characters serve as virtues that should be embraced in daily life, while the negative traits represent behaviors to be avoided.

Positive values foster admirable, praiseworthy, and endearing human qualities, leading to respect and love from others. In contrast, negative values promote harmful attitudes, poor behavior, and invite disdain and contempt which can be learned from the two of the most famous mountains of Gunung Raya, standing 893.9 meters high and Gunung Cincang merely 696.6 meters high. In between Gunung Raya and Gunung Cincang there is a much smaller hill and this one is properly called Bukit Sawak much lower, being only 471 meters high. The literature about Mat Cincang, Mat Raya and Mata Sawak associated with Langkawi, deeply rooted in the island's cultural and mythical heritage.

This story not only explains the formation of key natural features but also carries moral and cultural significance for the people of Langkawi. The clash of Mat Cincang and Mat Raya is one of Langkawi's most enduring legends, encapsulating themes of conflict, destruction, and reconciliation. The tale not only explains the island's geological features but also conveys important moral lessons about the dangers of pride and anger. Over time, this legend has become deeply ingrained in Langkawi's cultural identity, contributing to the island's allure as a place of both natural beauty and rich mythological history. The impact of the clash is felt in the island's geography, its cultural consciousness, and its role as a tourist destination, where myth and nature intertwine. According to Ismail (2000) legend, Mat Cincang and Mat Raya were two giants who were once close friends. Their families decided to unite through the

marriage of Mat Cincang's son and Mat Raya's daughter. However, during the wedding feast, a bitter quarrel erupted between the two giants. The cause of the dispute varies in different versions of the legend; some say it was because of a misunderstanding, while others say it was due to the behavior of Mat Cincang's son during the event. The cause of the dispute varies in different versions of the legend; some say it was because of a misunderstanding, while others say it was due to the behavior of Mat Cincang's son during the event.

The argument quickly escalated into a violent fight between the two giants. In their rage, they threw huge rocks and objects at each other, causing destruction across the island. Their epic battle is said to have resulted in the formation of several geographical features in Langkawi such as Gunung Cincang (Mount Cincang) was formed where Mat Cincang stood. Gunung Raya (Mount Raya) arose where Mat Raya was positioned, Gunung Sawak (Mount Sawak), a smaller hill, is believed to have been formed by a peacemaker who tried to intervene in the clash. During the battle, a pot of curry was knocked over, spilling onto the land and creating Kuah Town, a major town in Langkawi (the word "kuah" means gravy in Malay, Figure 1.)

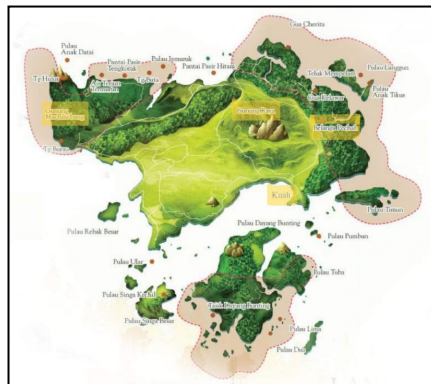


Figure 1. The Geographical And Landmarks Of The Clash Between Two Friends.
Source: langkawigeopark.com.my, 2017.

In folklore and mythology, this moral duality is often central to the narrative, reflecting broader cultural teachings.

Good traits such as courage, loyalty, and integrity are championed, while deceit, greed, and betrayal are condemned. In the legend of of Mat Raya and Mat Cincang, associated with the island's natural formations, represent the cultural importance of harmony and conflict resolution, as their legendary feud ends in reconciliation and a reminder of the value of peace over discord. These narratives reflect universal moral lessons that transcend time, offering guidance on human behavior and ethics.

Myths and legends can be used to draw tourists either as main or additional attractions, provide understanding into local history and values and be adopted to attract Western tourists due to the popularity of dark tourism market. (Abdul Razak & Ibrahim, 2017) The utilisation of myths and legends can create a mystic image and offer something extraordinary for potentials tourists to visit. In order to preserve the stories of myth and legends, Lagenda Langkawi was built in 1996, the combination of monumental stone sculptures and a sprawling garden evokes the myths and legends it was designed to commemorate but the lack of upkeep appears to have tarnished that original splendor. The important point about how preservation is key to maintaining not just the physical elements of a historical or cultural site, but also the stories and meanings attached to them. Without proper care, the legends themselves risk fading into obscurity along with the park.

As mentioned by Abdul Razak & Ibrahim (2017), in addition to marketing, the development of tourism products associated with myths and legends in Langkawi as promoting image relating to mythological and legendary tales is not sufficient to attract tourists motivated by these attributes. This effort should be supplemented by tourism products and attractions that inspired by myths and legends. The richness of Langkawi's mythology not only highlights its cultural history but also reflects the islanders' reverence for the natural world. From supernatural beings to mysterious caves and legendary animals, these stories also hold deeper symbolic meanings, reflecting the island's cultural values and its historical connection to natural formations. In other literature, Langkawai is often described as a "mythical island", where folk lore has been passed down

through generations, reinforcing its identity as a place where the mystical and natural worlds converge. These legends contribute to Langkawi's reputation as a cultural and historical treasure, attracting both scholars and tourists interested in its mythical past.

Therefore, the aim of this paper is to explore the use of stories as a concept to guide the design of tourism products such as doll as a medium to convey the legend of Mat Cincang as a case study. The doll concept depicts the character of Mat Cincang to be targeted for toy collectible market and dark tourism tourists. With the question of "How Mat Cincang doll can be created through story telling of myth and legend?" and "Why is it important to design a doll as culture promotional product?"

RESEARCH METHODS

The design of the Mat Cincang doll employed two key methodological approaches: semiotic analysis and brand-style DNA analysis. Semiotics, which focuses on the interpretation of signs and symbols, is particularly well-suited for analyzing and synthesizing the aesthetic components of a product, allowing designers to embed deeper cultural meanings into visual forms. Saussure (1916), as cited by Copley and Jansz (1998), identified the mutually inclusive relationship between the *signifier* (the form of a sign) and the *signified* (the concept it represents). In design, specific aesthetic elements such as color, texture, and shape serve as aesthetic signifiers that communicate the character and expression of a design, both discretely and collectively.

Barthes' (1972) model of *denotation* and *connotation* further extends this framework by distinguishing between the literal meaning (denotation) and the cultural or symbolic meaning (connotation) of design elements. Crow (1993) and Aaker (1996) applied this model to design style, showing how it helps to decode the layers of meaning embedded within aesthetic forms. These theoretical insights guided the analysis of the Mat Cincang doll, where visual elements such as color choices (earthy tones to reflect the natural landscape), textures (rock-like surfaces to echo the geological features of Mat

Cincang), and shapes (sharp, angular forms to symbolize the mountain's strength) were carefully selected to convey the myth's narrative and personality traits.

Brand-style DNA analysis, as outlined by Kapferer (2008), was used to ensure that the design remained consistent with a cohesive brand identity. This approach emphasizes the unique, intrinsic qualities that make a brand distinct. In the context of the Mat Cincang doll, the DNA of the design was crafted to reflect not only the mythological roots of the character but also to align with the broader cultural and tourism branding strategies of Langkawi. The structured application of both semiotic and brand-style DNA methodologies allowed for the creation of a doll that embodies the cultural symbolism of the Mat Cincang legend while maintaining a distinctive and marketable brand identity.

Moreover, the use of semiotics and brand-style DNA in product design is not only limited to cultural products. Krippendorff (2006) suggests that the meanings and interpretations people associate with objects are central to the success of design. Similarly, Papanek (1985) highlights that design for cultural products, in particular, requires sensitivity to both aesthetic and symbolic dimensions, making semiotics a vital tool for achieving deeper cultural resonance. These frameworks ensure that the Mat Cincang doll does more than act as a souvenir—it serves as a cultural intermediary, carrying the narrative weight of Langkawi's myths into the global tourism marketplace.

Semiotics, the study of signs and symbols, plays a key role in ensuring that the design of the doll communicates the intended meaning of the Mat Cincang myth. This involves:

1. Identify the Signs and Symbols: In semiotic analysis, signs are anything that conveys meaning, and they are composed of two parts: the *signifier* (the form which the sign takes) and the *signified* (the concept it represents). We begin with literature search and analysis as in Table 1 and used moodboard as in Figure 2 and Figure 3 to visually represent the key symbols and representations of the Mat Cincang

myth and with the moodboards, the Brand-style DNA analysis was tabulated as in Table 2.

Table 1- Analysis of semiotics

Element	Signifier	Signified/Connotation
Mat Cincang	Mountain	Power, <u>eternal presence</u> , <u>punishment</u>
Feud with Mat Raya	Conflict	Rivalry, pride, consequences of anger
Transformation into stone	Stone, immovability	Moral permanence, the weight of punishment
Cultural context	Malay folklore	Respect for nature, balance, and moral consequences

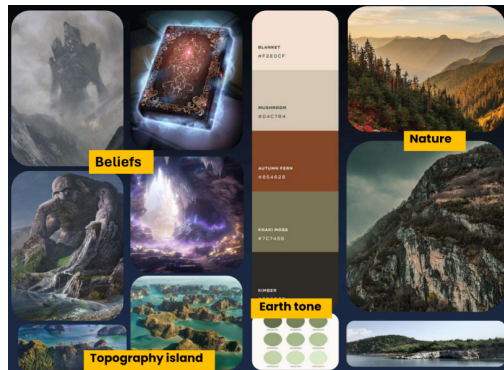


Figure 2. Moodboard represents cultural and mythical.

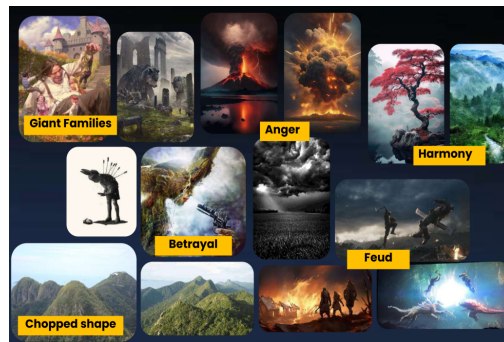


Figure 3. Moodboard represents feud between Mat Cincang and Mat Raya and Mat Sawak as the peace maker.

Table 2- Analysis of Brand-style DNA

DNA Component	DNA Description
Core Values	Tradition, Nature, Sustainability, Mythology
Visual Identity	Earthy tones (browns, greens, greys), angular shapes to reflect the mountain, gold accents for mysticism
Tone	Educational, empowering, storytelling
Voice	Mystical, cultural, authentic
Brand Personality	Mythical, cultural ambassador, timeless, sustainable
Emotional Appeal	Nostalgia for locals, curiosity for tourists, connection to nature

2. Denotation (Literal Representation)

Denotation is the literal or primary meaning of a sign. The denotation of Mat Chincang is simply a character from a myth who becomes a mountain.The analysis of Mat Cincang characters and clothing was done to reinforcing a connection to the myth as in Figure 4 and Figure 5.




PRODUCT GENES:		
NODES	GENOTYPES	PHENOTYPES
		
SEMANTIC SIGNIFIER & SIGNIFIED	DESIGN DNA STYLE	SHAPE (ENVIRONMENT)
<p>SIGNIFIER Symbol: The giant wearing traditional Malay cloth.</p> <p>INDEX The giant, particularly his participation in the fight, and the changes in the way of life and the use of the giant for the weapon.</p> <p>ICONE The giant wearing traditional Malay cloth which is a culture of Kuching.</p> <p>SIGNIFIED In the scene, they are fighting, and the appearance is wearing Malay cloth which is from Kuching.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organic Nature Traditional Songket Weaving Floral Motifs Islamic artistic traditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organic Geometric Shapes Wave shape Symmetry shape Emphasized Curve Islamic Geometry

Figure 4. The **Denotation** analysis of Mat Cincang characters.

MAT CHINCANG					
DESIGN LANGUAGE	IMPRESSION		EXPRESSION		STRUCTURE
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Big size Strength 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conflict Giant families Feud 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Earth tone Transformation Symbolism
SEMOTICS	SIGNIFIER		SIGNIFIED		
	<p>The giant that started the fight, Mat Chincang represents a giant character in the legend.</p>		<p>He signifies power, conflict, and the potential for change or destruction.</p>		
MYTH	INDEX	SYMBOL	ICON	CANNOTATION	DENOTATION
	<p>Mat Chincang's have conflict with Mat Raps and the subsequent transformation to mountain</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Giant families Incredible energy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chopped mountain shape 	<p>Mat Chincang is depicted as a giant involved in a dispute with Mat Raps over their children's engagement.</p>	<p>Considerations may include themes of rivalry, pride, and the consequences of unresolved conflicts.</p>
<p>A towering, muscular giant, feared for his great size and strength, engaged in fierce conflicts with other giants, driven by ego and temperament. This battle, filled with power struggles and potential destruction, is known throughout the country. Despite the chaos, there is a fundamental possibility for change, as the actions of giants have the potential to shape the world around them. Based on this, people know the legend.</p>					

Figure 5. The **Denotation** analysis of Mat Cincang styles clothing from the era of the legend.

From the analyses above it can be concluded that;

- i. The Mountain: Mat Chincang is transformed into a mountain after his quarrel. Mountains often symbolize permanence, immovability, and strength.
- ii. The Conflict: The feud between Mat Chincang and Mat Raya represents larger social dynamics and themes like pride, power, and rivalry.
- iii. Transformation into Stone: The transformation of Mat Chincang into a mountain can be interpreted as a symbolic act of punishment, solidification of moral consequences, or the permanence of certain legendary figures in culture.

From the narratives above, the story of Mat Cincang, Mat Raya and Mat Sawak is significant in the Malay folklore especially in Langkawi. The myth highlights the role of stories in maintaining cultural identity and transmitting values. These narratives carry lessons that shape collective memory and influence the behaviors and beliefs of a community. In a globalized world, such myths contribute to the preservation of local traditions and offer unique insights into the ways different cultures address universal human issues.

The myth highlights the destructive nature of unresolved disputes. In failing to reconcile or compromise, the giants cause damage not only to themselves but also to the community around them. This narrative reinforces the need for dialogue, forgiveness, and the importance of controlling emotions in moments of tension. Through the downfall of the giants, the story teaches humility. It suggests that understanding one's limitations and respecting others' perspectives is crucial for maintaining harmony in relationships and society. In a broader philosophical context, the myth can be interpreted as a cautionary tale about the perils of ego-driven actions.

The myth teaches that human actions, whether positive or negative, leave an imprint on the environment. It underscores the connection between people and the natural world, with nature often reflecting or responding to human behavior. These lessons are relevant across time and cultures. From the dangers of pride and conflict to the importance of humility and social

harmony, these stories carry rich moral, philosophical, and environmental teachings. Moreover, the myth plays an essential role in preserving cultural identity and heritage, illustrating the power of storytelling in shaping values and worldviews across generations. It showed that Mat Cincang, Mat Raya and Mat Sawak is important to be highlighted. However, there was vague visual representation of Mat Cincang from literature search. Therefore, benchmarking as in Figure 6, was done to understand the character through selected archetypes which to provide a deeper insight into the myth's character of powerful and cold, dignity and proud persons. Three character archetypes were chosen; the hulk to symbolize the powerful giant and hot tempered, Rudy Agent Ali to symbolize a cold character. Rudy agent Ali is a character in famous Malaysian animation series that was chosen to portray the futuristic contemporary scenario of Malaysia.



Figure 6. The **Benchmarking of archetypes character**.



Figure 7. The **development of posture**.

Series of sketches for concept development as in Figure 7, 8 and 9 were visualized based on facial and posture features of the archetypes character. Further the detail and exploration as in Figure 10, was visualized based on the Hulk and Rudy Agent Ali with different clothing. Figure 11 is another detail and exploration of using body type 3 from Figure 9 with the combination the "orang lama Langkawi " clothing which was chosen as the final doll design concept.

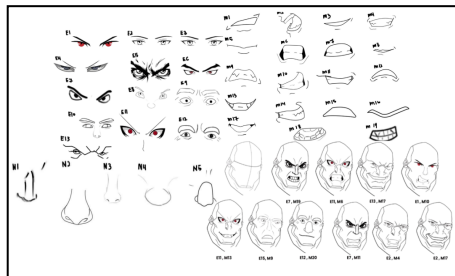


Figure 8. The **development of facial expression.**

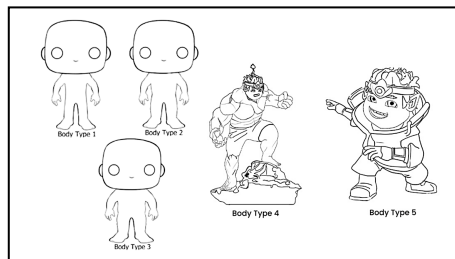


Figure 9. The **development using Rudy Agent Ali facial expression.**

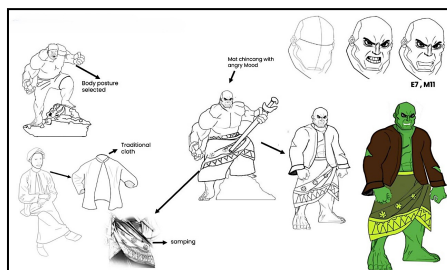


Figure 10. The **development using the Hulk facial expression. with clothing and colors.**

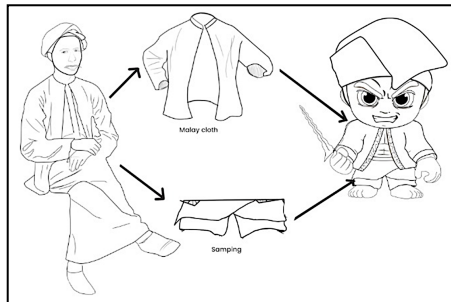


Figure 11. The **development using Rudy Agent Ali facial expression with clothing and colors.**

Figure 12 illustrates the final doll design of Mat Cincang, which fulfilled the criteria of Mat Cincang characters which is leadership and strength, wisdom, hot-tempered, vengeance and pride.



Figure 12. The **final concept of Mat Cincang doll.**

DISCUSSION

The aim of this paper is to explore how stories, particularly myths and legends, can guide the design of tourism products, using the Mat Cincang doll as a case study. The research addresses two core questions: *How can a Mat Cincang doll be created through storytelling of myths and legends?* and *Why is it important to design a doll as a cultural promotional product?* These questions highlight the role of storytelling in shaping the visual and symbolic elements of the doll, transforming it into a medium for cultural transmission. The adaptation of semiotic principles and Brand-style DNA has proven to be an essential tool in conveying both explicit and implicit messages about the personality and narrative of Mat Cincang, offering a structured framework to decode the rich mythology behind the figure.

Semiotic analysis in this context enabled the researcher to interpret key narrative elements such as color, shape, texture, and form—to create a design that signifies Mat Cincang's mythological identity. This method parallels similar works by Stephen (1993), who demonstrated how dolls serve as cultural intermediaries, reflecting societal values such as gender roles and family structures. Likewise, Amoian and Motlaq (2022) used Roland Barthes' semiotic theory to analyze the Barbie doll myth, illustrating how even contemporary toys carry underlying cultural messages.

What is essential in these examples, and particularly relevant to the Mat Cincang doll, is the awareness of the cultural context of the audience. As Monica Chen (2020), a user experience designer for Barbie, noted, cultural misalignments can occur when Western ideals are imposed on Eastern markets. In the case of Barbie, Chinese consumers did not fully grasp the feminist message behind the doll, instead viewing her as a symbol of beauty rather than empowerment. This underscores the importance of culturally sensitive design when creating products for cultural promotion.

The concept of Brand-style DNA is essential for creating a cohesive and recognizable cultural product. According to Kapferer (2008), Brand DNA refers to the core elements that define a brand's identity, such as values, personality, and visual identity, which remain consistent over time. For the Mat

Cincang doll, the Brand-style DNA should reflect the values and aesthetics of Langkawi's tourism, creating a product that is not only visually appealing but also symbolically aligned with the island's cultural heritage. By incorporating Brand-style DNA into the Mat Cincang doll's design, the product becomes part of the broader narrative of Langkawi as a tourist destination.

The doll's design, with its natural themes and cultural significance, mirrors the island's branding as a place of natural beauty and rich folklore. The integration of these elements ensures coherence with Langkawi's tourism brand, helping the Mat Cincang doll stand out in the market while remaining true to its cultural roots. This approach is particularly relevant given the growing market for cultural and collectible toys. The Mat Cincang doll, if positioned effectively, could appeal not only to tourists but also to collectors interested in unique, culturally significant products. The alignment of Brand DNA with Langkawi's tourism goals thus enhances the doll's appeal as both a cultural artifact and a desirable collectible item.

The growing market for collectible toys presents a strong opportunity for the Mat Cincang doll as a cultural product. A report by Market Decipher (2023) forecasts that the toy collectibles market will grow to USD 35.3 billion by 2032, driven by factors such as nostalgia, pop culture influences, limited editions, and the rise of e-commerce platforms. The design of Mat Cincang as a collectible doll aligns well with this booming market. By combining local folklore with innovative design strategies, the doll has the potential to bridge the gap in current promotional products, which often fail to fully capture the essence of myths, legends, and their geographical contexts.

However, one of the key challenges is ensuring that the Mat Cincang doll resonates with both local and international consumers. While the doll's design can draw on Langkawi's myths and legends, it must also appeal to the tastes and expectations of a global audience. This requires a careful balance between authenticity and marketability, ensuring that the doll remains true to its cultural origins while also being accessible and desirable to collectors worldwide. Despite the promising prospects, the research acknowledges a significant limitation: the absence of a proof of concept. While the

theoretical framework is robust, further investigation is needed to assess the commercial viability and cultural impact of the Mat Cincang doll. Future research should focus on conducting market testing to evaluate consumer reception, both in Langkawi and globally.

CONCLUSION

This paper has explored the application of semiotics and Brand-style DNA in the Mat Cincang doll design, particularly how visual elements can convey cultural messages and deeper societal meanings. By utilizing semiotic principles such as signifier and signified, denotation, connotation, and codes, the analysis has demonstrated how myths and legends can serve as narrative-driven design strategies for innovative promotional products. The findings contribute to a gap in current research by illustrating how mythological and legendary stories, such as the tale of Mat Cincang, can be effectively translated into a tangible tourism product like a collectible doll using Brand-style DNA.

The integration of application of semiotic principles, alongside Brand-style DNA, creates a framework that ensures the doll not only reflects Langkawi's cultural identity but also aligns with the island's tourism branding. This makes the Mat Cincang doll a powerful tool for cultural transmission for the preservation and promotion of local heritage. The Mat Cincang doll design offers a creative solution to preserving traditional stories, addressing the limitations of current marketing and promotional efforts.

The global market for collectible toys, projected to grow significantly, provides a fertile ground for the Mat Cincang doll to succeed as both a cultural and commercial product. However, the research highlights the importance of balancing cultural authenticity with global marketability to ensure the product resonates with diverse audiences. The absence of a proof of concept is a limitation, suggesting the need for further research in market testing to evaluate the doll's cultural impact and commercial potential. If these challenges are addressed, the Mat Cincang doll could effectively bridge the gap between cultural promotion and global collectible trends.

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