



Is it male or female? Exploring brand association and personification of a textile-based tourism destination

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Abstract

Located in Central Java Province, Indonesia, Lasem town actually has all the requisite conditions needed for a tourism destination, including attractions, accessibility, activities, amenities and accommodations. However, the town's sub-districts that have major attractions as traditional textile-based destinations are not visited by many tourists. This study aims to measure the association and personification of the name 'Lasem'. Data were collected through an online survey involving 289 participants who lived within a radius of 505 kilometres from Lasem. The authors applied a projective technique to question the participants. As a result, Lasem was associated with the name of an institution, place, community, tourism, and name of the city. Furthermore, Lasem was personified as a young man between 21-25 years old, unmarried, and already working. This 'man' had human characters, such as being good, quiet, calm, friendly, and patient. Such research is very useful for companies or authorities who will do marketing for the city as a tourism destination. This information can be used as the basis for the development of the marketing concept and the selection of promotional tools so that the objectives of the marketing campaign could be achieved effectively and efficiently.

Keywords: Lasem, brand association, brand personification, projective technique, tourism destination, Indonesia.

Introduction

Economically, tourism has benefited hosts, supporting industries and the government (Afthanorhan et al., 2017). For this reason, these three parties are often



seen together creating and developing tourism destinations, both new and existing (Akama, 2002). They strive to attract the attention of visitors, including those who must work together and even compete with other destination managers. A destination needs to build a unique identity (Ekinci and Hosany, 2006). For that reason, destinations need to have a personality. One thing that should not be forgotten by managers of tourism destinations is effective and efficiently handled branding. A city name is a brand (Trueman et al., 2004). Brand is a 'person' (Hanby, 1999). Therefore, a brand should have a personality. Aaker (1997) mentions brand personality dimensions including sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness. The more often heard, the better-perceived personality of the brand by consumers. In this case, the researcher chose Lasem which is, a small town in the city of Jepara, in the province of Central Java, Indonesia.

Lasem is a sub-district in Central Java Province, Indonesia, which has a long history when it comes to the existence of the first humans from China who travelled to Indonesia. That's why, Lasem has many magnificent buildings of the remains of the early explorers whose descendants are still firmly established to this day. Lasem also tells us a story of how the local Javanese people fought alongside the Chinese immigrants against the Dutch invading soldiers. For example, the Han family of Lasem, also called the Han family of East Java or Surabaya, was a very influential family of the 'Cabang Atas' or the Chinese gentry of the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia) (Salmon, 1991).

The Chinese in Lasem are those who have wealth which is well above that of the average locals. But the prosperity of these immigrants does not create any gap between these two groups of people. In contrast, in various fields, they are complementary to one another, including the economic, political, social, cultural, and religious areas and elements. Chinese migrants introduced batik-making techniques to the Lasem community which later became one of the hallmarks of the area. Lasem Batik has a specificity both in terms of colouring and its unique design.

Lasem is very close to the tradition of batik. Batik is a traditional textile by painting motifs on Mori cloth. Painting this cloth is done in two ways, manually written or stamped. Lasem is one of the chief batik producing cities, besides Pekalongan, Solo, Yogyakarta and Cirebon. Each of these cities have distinctive motifs that can distinguish the result of their batik work. Especially, batik in Lasem is influenced by its pervading Chinese culture. This is then due to the fact that the culture of making batik in the region was started by the Chinese in the 19th century. Besides having a tradition of batik, Lasem also has large Chinese-style houses which in some cases are more than a century old, some of which are still well maintained, although some have switched their function as a place to support tourism development.

After decades of glory, Lasem became a lonely city abandoned by her great men. The predominantly large houses built in Chinese architectural styles are empty with no occupants in sight. The descendants of the rich Chinese left Lasem years ago and most of them deliberately went to avoid the 'curse', which supposedly would



make the businesses of the Chinese descendants decline and eventually cease to exist. The women will also be barren. Now, the local community and several parties from outside Lasem, are attempting to revive the town. They have begun to realise and are now also more aware that Lasem deserves to be a tourist area as it undoubtedly possesses the potential to attract many tourists.

From the authors' observations, Lasem's name is not widely known by people who live in the capital city of Jakarta and its surroundings. How then can one expect tourists to come to the area if they don't know Lasem? For this reason, vigorous efforts need to be made to promote Lasem. In the marketing practices, long before promoting a destination, what needs to be done is to measure the personality of the brand. One of the important elements in brand personality research is brand personification. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate brand association and brand personification of a less known town. Particularly in the tourism field of study, brand association and brand personification have a lack of scholarly attention. Previous scholars opted to select prominent brands in their studies. For example, John et al. (2006) selected McDonald's. Gbadamosi (2015) chose Miss Selfridges. Cheng-Hsui Chen (2001) employed Acer, Twinhead, HP, Epson, Nike, and Jump. In contrast in this current study, the authors chose Lasem, a city that is known by very few people.

Literature Review

Brand association

The authors de Chernatony and Riley (1997) define brand as "a legal instrument, as a logo, as a company, as an identity system, as an image in consumers' minds, as a personality, as a relationship, as adding value and as an evolving". The more popular a brand, the easier it will be for people to associate it with many things, both favourable and unfavourable (Vicary, 1948). The brand associations are usually influenced by many things, including the level of experience of those who perceive it. From the results of studies conducted by John et al. (2006), McDonald's restaurant is associated with meals, service, values, fun, kids, family, and social involvement. Furthermore, the meals are associated with a quality brand, and products. Meanwhile, value is generally associated with quality, product, and brand.

Aaker (1991) mentions that brand association is one of the dimensions of brand equity along with brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association, and other aspects related to brand assets. According to Keller (1993), there are three categories of brand association including attributes, benefits, and attitudes. Cheng-Hsui Chen (2001) claims that brand association will lead to product and organisational association.



Based on the discussion of the theories above, the first research question that the authors submitted is:

RQ1: To what extent does the word 'Lasem' associate and have meaning?

Brand personification

According to Cohen (2014), brand personification is “ the use by a brand of a character with humanlike characters in packaging, promotion, public relations, or for other marketing-related purposes”. Cohen (2014) also adds that brand personification is “imbuing trademarked or otherwise proprietary-named products and services with a human form and/or human attributes, including a generally distinctive physical appearance and personality”. Furthermore, Cohen (2014) explains that there are five different characteristics from the brand personification. According to him, brand personification should symbolize a brand that is also the spokesperson of the brand. In addition, brand personifications must function as brand ambassadors and mascots of the brand. Besides, brand personification must be able to have a relationship with the brand it represents. For example Ronald McDonald is a clown character used as the primary mascot of the McDonald's fast-food restaurant chain. In television commercials, the clown inhabited a fantasy world called McDonaldland to which he had adventures with his friends Mayor McCheese, the Hamburglar, Grimace, Birdie the Early Bird and The Fry Kids (Bellomo, 2016).

In the marketing field of study, brand personification method has been employed by prior studies to explore various aspects including brand image (Hofstede et al., 2007), brand relationship (Huang and Mitchell, 2014), relationship marketing and branding strategy (Gupta et al., 2010). In addition, brand personification is important to affect brand equity (Aguirre-Rodriguez, 2014). Further, Davies et al. (2001) employ brand personification to measure corporate reputation. Aaker (1997) uses personification to delineate dimensions of brand personality.

Chen et al. (2015) mention three types of personification including anthropomorphism (“celebrity endorsers or human characters embodied with characteristics, e.g., Marlboro Man”), zoomorphism (“animals endowed with humanlike characteristics and act like persons, e.g., Tony the Tiger for Kellogg’s”), and teramorphism (“objects incarnated by humanlike characteristics and act like persons, e.g., M&M’s chocolate”). Anthropomorphism can be used to predict self-branded integration and brand love (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2017),

Based on these existing studies, here is the second research question proposed.

RQ2: To what extent is the word 'Lasem' personified?



Research Methods

Projective method

The authors constructed an online questionnaire and distributed links from the questionnaire to three representatives of three different sections of a private university through a WhatsApp message. These three participants each distributed the link to the rest of their classes. Then, each class member was asked to resend the questionnaire link to five students they knew, both on campus where they were studying and on other campuses.

The authors addressed the research questions using a projective technique. According to Morrison et al. (2011), "projective techniques involve the use of stimuli that allow participants to project their subjective or deep-seated beliefs onto other people or objects". The use of projective method is very common in researching brand image, brand association, and brand personification (Avis and Aitken, 2015, Vicary, 1948, Hofstede et al., 2007).

To find out about the word association of 'Lasem', the author asked what happened the first time when the participant heard the word 'Lasem'. Further, to personalise Lasem, the writer asked several questions to the participants as follows:

If 'Lasem' was someone's name,:

- What is the sex of this person?
- How old is this person?
- Is this person married?
- What is the character of this person like?
- Where is the type of destination that this person liked to take a vacation at?
- What is this person's favourite colour?

Participants

A total of 293 participants were involved. However only 282 data returns could be used by authors regarding the completeness of the questionnaires they filled in. There were 196 female participants (69.5%) and 86 male participants. Most of them, were aged between 20 and 24 years of age(89.7%). Predominantly, the participants (46.5%) preferred a vacation on the beach or in the sea.



Table 1. Participants' profile of the first study

Profile		Frequency	Percent
Sex	Male	86	30.5
	Female	196	69.5
	Total	282	100.0
Age	>24	8	2.8
	20-24	253	89.7
	<20	21	7.4
Favourite destination for holiday	Mountains/villages/forests	84	29.8
	Sea/beach	131	46.5
	Cities	52	18.4
	Events	15	5.3
	Total	282	100.0

Results

Association

When the participants were asked whether they had heard about the word 'Lasem', 14 participants (5%) indicated they did. Further, 107 participants refused to answer the question relating to association of the word 'Lasem'. Among these, 84 participants (29.8%) said that they have no knowledge about the word while 15 of them (5.3%) said that they had never heard of the word. Eight of them (2.8%) claimed that they had nothing crossing their mind relating to the word.

Up to 31 participants (11.1%) associated Lasem with 'tourism' including tourism (4.3%), holiday (1.8%), tourism destination (1.8%), travel (1.1%), travel agent (0.7%), tour guide (0.7%), tourism program (0.7%), and tourism destination (1.8%). In addition, 30 participants (10.7%) related Lasem with 'place' including place (5.7%), city 2.5%), Java (1.1%), Chinese (0.7%), and sub-district 0.7%). Furthermore, five participants (1.8%) associated Lasem with batik making and two participants (0.4%) associated it with the 'Chinese'.

Table 2. The word association of Lasem

No	Association	Freq.	Percent	No	Association	Freq.	Percent
1	Institution	29	10.3	16	Strange	3	1.1
2	Place	16	5.7	17	Travel	3	1.1
3	Balm	14	5	18	Chinese	2	0.7
4	Tourism	12	4.3	19	Permit letter	2	0.7



5	City	7	2.5	20	Phrase	2	0.7
6	Medicine	7	2.5	21	Sub-district	2	0.7
7	Food	6	2.1	22	Tour guide	2	0.7
8	Acronym	5	1.8	23	Tourism program	2	0.7
9	Batik Lasem	5	1.8	24	Travel agent	2	0.7
10	Holiday	5	1.8		Total	145	51.8
11	Taste	5	1.8				
12	Tourism destination	5	1.8	25	Never heard before	99	35.1
13	Java	3	1.1	26	Nothing crosses my mind	17	6
14	Laser	3	1.1	27	Others	21	7.4
15	Someone's name	3	1.1		Total	137	48.5

Personification

It was predominant that the participants perceived that Lasem was a male (152%) and he was between 21-25 years old. Furthermore, Lasem was unmarried (46.1%) and employed 29.8%). Lasem would prefer either the mountains or countryside for a vacation (50%). Also, in term of Lasem's favourite colour, most participants perceived it to be blue (25.2%) and this was followed by green as the second favorite choice (17.4%).

Table 3. Lasem's profile as perceived by participants

Profile	Freq.	Percent	Profile	Freq.	Percent
Sex			Marital status		
Male	152	53.9	Married	97	34.4
Female	90	31.9	Unmarried	130	46.1
Unidentified	40	14.2	Separated/ Divorced	19	6.7
Total	282	100	Widow/widower	36	12.8
Age			Favourite of vacation destination		
<6	9	3.2	Mountains/countryside	152	53.9
6-10	31	11	Sea/beaches	67	23.8
11-15	21	7.4	Urban	42	14.9
16-20	44	15.6	Events	32	11.3
21-25	50	17.7	Favourite colour		



26-30	39	13.8	Purple	15	5.3
31-35	16	5.7	Black	28	9.9
36-40	24	8.5	Blue	71	25.2
41-45	17	6	Brown	28	9.9
>45	29	0.1	Green	49	17.4
			Grey	11	3.9
Employment status			Orange	14	5
Employed	84	29.8	Pink	11	3.9
Cannot work	8	2.8	Red	21	7.4
Looking for a job	29	10.3	White	11	3.9
Unemployed	17	6	Yellow	18	6.4
Self-employed	58	20.6	Others	5	1.8
Retired	23	8.2			
Studying	48	17			
Just quit from a job	15	5.3			

If Lasem was a person, he was predominantly personified as a good person. The character of Lasem as perceived by participants as being good (27 participants), he was quiet (18 participants), calm (17 participants), friendly (14 participants), patient (11 participants), cheerful (nine participants), gentle (eight participants), and also assertive (seven participants).

Table 4. Characters of Lasem

No	Characters	Freq.	Percent	No	Characters	Freq.	Percent
1	Good	27	9.6	42	Happy	1	0.4
2	Quiet	18	6.4	43	Smart	1	0.4
3	Calm	17	6.0	44	Clumsy	1	0.4
4	Friendly	14	5.0	45	Childish	1	0.4
5	Patient	11	3.9	46	Responsible	1	0.4
6	Cheerful	9	3.2	47	Active	1	0.4
7	Gentle	8	2.8	48	Open minded	1	0.4
8	Assertive	7	2.5	49	Smelly	1	0.4
9	Stubborn	6	2.1	50	Careless	1	0.4
10	Polite	6	2.1	51	Religious	1	0.4
11	Humble	6	2.1	52	Agile	1	0.4
12	Innocent	6	2.1	53	Authoritative	1	0.4
13	Tacky	6	2.1	54	Brave	1	0.4
14	Ignorant	5	1.8	55	Cheerful	1	0.4
15	Hard worker	5	1.8	56	Companionate	1	0.4
16	Captious	4	1.4	57	Critical	1	0.4
17	Simple	4	1.4	58	Exited	1	0.4
18	Wise	3	1.1	59	Grumpy	1	0.4



19	Independent	3	1.1	60	Flirtatious	1	0.4
20	Boring	3	1.1	61	Good listener	1	0.4
21	Cool	3	1.1	62	Hard	1	0.4
22	Funny	3	1.1	63	High curiosity	1	0.4
23	Mature	3	1.1	64	Independent	1	0.4
24	No idea	3	1.1	65	Lame	1	0.4
25	Sad	3	1.1	66	Less able to work together	1	0.4
26	Shy	3	1.1	67	Less serious	1	0.4
27	Weird	3	1.1	68	Objective	1	0.4
28	Lazy	2	0.7	69	Old	1	0.4
29	Evil	2	0.7	70	Perfectionist	1	0.4
30	Violent	2	0.7	71	Resilient	1	0.4
31	Adventurer	2	0.7	72	Short	1	0.4
32	Motherhood	2	0.7	73	Silly	1	0.4
33	Old-fashioned	2	0.7	74	Surrender	1	0.4
34	Psychopath	2	0.7	75	Talk less	1	0.4
35	Selfish	2	0.7	76	Talkative	1	0.4
36	Sissy	2	0.7	77	Traditional	1	0.4
37	Strong	2	0.7	78	Traveller	1	0.4
38	Clumsy	2	0.8	79	Unfriendly	1	0.4
39	Diligent	2	0.8	80	Visionary	1	0.4
40	Arrogant	1	0.4	81	Well organised	1	0.4
41	Fun	1	0.4				

Discussion

Considering that the name of a city is a brand name, this study aimed to examine brand association and brand personification of Lasem, a sub-district town in Central Java Province, Indonesia, which is about 505 kilometres from Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia. For more than a century, this town has tried to build its own identity. In recent years, authorities and communities have worked together to develop the tourism industry in the area and attract more visitors.

There are two main findings of this study. The first finding is about word association. In general, every brand owner will be happy when in the study of a brand association they find many words associated with the brand. The more words that are associated with it, the more likely the brand is in the mind of consumers. In this study, Lasem was associated with 24 words. Some associations are related to tourism, places, batik, and Chinese. Nationally, Lasem is known as a city with a heritage of traditional textiles in the form of batik and a strong Chinese culture that can be seen from the batik design and the unique architecture of several old buildings there. However, there was little hint (0.7%) from these findings on the batik value which reveal Lasem's connection as a traditional textile-based tourism destination is limited and nearly non-existent.



The second finding is about the word personification. This study showed that participants had personified Lasem as being a young man between 20-25 years old, unmarried, and already working. With such a demographic profile, Lasem should now be a person who is very productive and who has aggressively developed, and is in tune with the current trends and also activities according to his era. On the other hand, Lasem is now Lasem who still maintains hundreds of year old houses (Fauzy et al., 2012) and even some of the residents are entrepreneurs in traditional batik fabrics. The batik business in Lasem is over a hundred years old (Rahayu, 2014). Lasem's personification in this case is not correct as few know about its possibilities. This inadequacy could be due to the weak marketing activities carried out by the authorities in promoting Lasem as a tourism destination.

Relating to the colour Lasem preferred, most participants perceived that Lasem would associate with blue. Indeed, colour does matter in marketing (Singh, 2006). Every corporate identity puts colour as an essential aspect of logo or other aspects of the identity (Tantanatewin and Inkarojrit, 2016, Melewar et al., 2017). However, personification in blue did not seem to match Lasem that is very imbued with Chinese culture. So far, Chinese culture tends toward favouring red instead (Qiang, 2011).

Another question to be addressed to participants was about the favourite vacation destination of Lasem if Lasem was a person. This question was intended to drag out the perception of participants as to what kind of place Lasem would be personified as. In reality, Lasem tends to be a sub-district rather than a countryside town eventhough parts of this town comprises of paddy fields and rolling countryside. As perceived by participants, Lasem was either a mountain or country side area. Another big group of participants also perceived that Lasem would like sea or beaches for his vacation. In fact, Lasem is a coastal city and the sea influences its culture immensely (Utomo et al., 2018). In ancient years, it had an international harbour where foreign ships came over it (itused to be called Na-ts'an) (Mills, 1979). In current days, only local and domestic boats come to it.

Furthermore, Lasem was personified with 81 human characteristics. This finding indicates the wildness of the participants' perceptions toward the word 'Lasem'. This shows us the weak knowledge of participants about the word and its associations. Less attention toward a brand would clearly result in less interest in the brand (Sugiyama and Andree, 2010).

Conclusion

This study aimed to examine brand association and brand personification using Lasem. By chance, most of the participants involved in the study were those who did not know the meaning of the word 'Lasem'. They did not know that Lasem is a town that is more than a century old, and has strong Javanese and Chinese culture, as well as a legacy of traditional textile-making which is as old as the existence of



ethnic Chinese in the city. The word 'Lasem' is associated with the name of an institution, place, balm, type of tourism, name of city, and even medicine. Furthermore, the participants personified Lasem as a young man between the ages of 21-25 who was unmarried, but already worked. This study also revealed that Lasem was personified as good, quiet, calm, friendly, patient, cheerful, gentle, and assertive man.

The kind of research conducted in this study is very useful for companies or authorities who conduct marketing for the town as a tourism destination. This information can be used as the basis for the development of the marketing concept and the selection of promotional tools so that the objectives of the marketing campaign could be achieved effectively and more efficiently.

This study involved most respondents who had not heard the word 'Lasem' at all. On the one hand, this research gives an important signal about the weakness of branding practices by Lasem tourism destination managers. The findings above were obtained from participants who mostly did not know anything about Lasem. Other findings may be different if the participants recruited were those who knew Lasem in some sense. For this reason, further research may consider involving those who know about the destination to be researched, or research conducted on the same destination but carried out before and after a marketing campaign is conducted. On the other hand, by involving respondents who have not been affected by Lasem's marketing activities, it seems that they negate the marketing activities that have been carried out so far as being ineffectual. The involvement of those who have not heard Lasem's words can also lead opinion as Lasem as a 'new' town that needs attention from the public and the mass media. In this case, the authors realise that this is one of the drawbacks of this study.

Another weakness of this study is that this research was not followed up with proper qualitative research, so that the results of this study have not yet been most effectively completed. For this reason, future studies can use a multi-method technique in collecting data so that the personification of words related to the city can be better explored. The authors also recommend developing personifications for other cities that are more popular, so that evaluations can be made on marketing activities that have been developed over a long period of time.

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