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Animalium: Visual Identity and Meaning-Making Through Character Design

ANIMALIUM

This project tells a simple lore about animals, each carrying its own unique meaning. It originally began as a commissioned work for Anutara, a premium shop at Universitas Multimedia Nusantara. As part of the KG Group, Anutara embraces the 5C philosophy — Competitive, Competent, Caring, Credible, and Customer Delight. This project seeks to bring those values to life by portraying them as living creatures, with each animal embodying one of these core principles.

Metaphors can appear in visual form (Forceville, 2002). Visual metaphors are a way for humans to understand abstract concepts in life. In designing the characters, the author uses the visual metaphor framework theory by Lakoff and Johnson. In this method, the company's core values are analogized as animal characters that have specific traits symbolizing those values.

Target domain
(abstract)



Source domain
(concrete)

The author uses Rudolf Arnheim's creative design method. He believes that the creative process is not a rigid, step-by-step process. Arnheim also stated that the visual process is not just about expression, but also about reasoning. Using Arnheim's gestalt theory, the author breaks it down as follows:

1. Figure ground: The main subject must be placed as clearly as possible and stand out from the background. That's the reason why the author uses central composition to increase emphasis of the characters.
2. Proximity: The term proximity often refers to the distance between elements. Sometimes this distance isn't just about space but can also be about the color combination that accompanies them. Color choice can impact visual perception.
3. Similarity: Similarity is defined as the grouping of visual elements so that they psychologically appear as a single unit. The main subject is outlined for clarity, while decorative elements are rendered without outlines.
4. Continuity: The dotted lines around the main subject serve as a tool to further strengthen the position of the main subject as an emphasis.

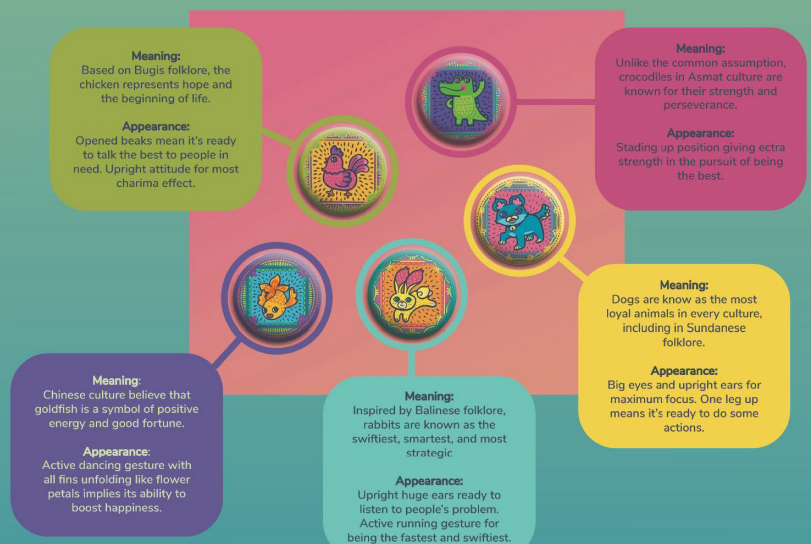
After long and thoughtful research process, each character is finally created by considering its meaning, physical characteristics, and its connection to Indonesian folklore. One particular animal has been adjusted to be more generally accepted, such as rabbit. The animal should be a mouse-deer, but mouse-deer, while culturally significant within Indonesia, lacks global familiarity and distinct physical features compared to other animals featured in the design. Consequently, the substitution was made to enhance accessibility and audience relatability. The author decides to change it into rabbit. The colour selection is based on bright and contrasting colours to attract attention and make it easy to implement across various types of merchandise.

Abstract	Concrete	Colour
Competent	Rabbit	Yellow, colours of lightning
Competitive	Crocodile	Green, colour of power
Credible	Dog	Blue, colour of trust
Caring	Chicken	Pink, colour of love
Customer delight	Goldfish	Orange, colour of gold



Turning corporate values into characters is not done without careful consideration. Besides aiming to increase awareness, a company mascot is a way to build an emotional connection, making the values feel real and relatable. Merchandising also helps keep the character alive and serves as a daily reminder in employees daily lives.

By leveraging well-designed mascots, organizations and communities can create a strong emotional connection with their audience. A good character design serves not only as memorable symbols but also as powerful marketing tools that enhance visibility and brand identity. Investing in character design is therefore a strategic move that can yield meaningful returns in both public recognition and commercial success.



Reference:

1. C. Forceville, Pictorial Metaphor in Advertising. London, UK: Routledge, 2002.
2. R. Arnheim, Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye. New Version. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1974.

Animalium: Visual Identity and Meaning-Making Through Character Design

Nadia Mahatmi, M.Ds.

This artwork presents “Animalium”, a commissioned design project created for Anutara, a premium shop at Universitas Multimedia Nusantara (UMN), which serves as a flagship representing UMN’s acclaimed design school, one of the top choices for visual communication design (DKV) in Indonesia. The project’s purpose was to visually express the abstract 5C of Kompas Gramedia core value in a way that could be easily understood by a wide audience. To achieve this, the design process employed the visual metaphors theory by Lakoff and Johnson, a method that transforms abstract ideas into concrete, perceivable forms. The results demonstrate how metaphorical representation can successfully bridge the gap between conceptual frameworks and visual communication, producing engaging and meaningful design outcomes. The significance of this work lies in its contribution to design practice, showing how theoretical models like visual metaphors can enhance the clarity, accessibility, and impact of complex institutional values when applied thoughtfully in branding and visual design.

Sustainable Development Goal(s) Relevancy

Goal 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

References

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Short Biography

Nadia Mahatmi is an illustrator from Indonesia whose work spans across every style — from playful doodles and dreamy watercolors to bold digital pieces and intricate ink details. With a passion for exploring diverse techniques and visual languages, Nadia creates art that connects with a wide range of audiences and projects. Her versatility allows her to adapt to any mood, theme, or concept, making her a dynamic creative force in the Indonesian art scene. Whether working on personal illustrations, collaborations, or commercial projects, Nadia brings a unique blend of imagination, skill, and cultural depth to every piece she creates.



Title

Animalium: Visual Identity and Meaning-Making Through Character Design

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Publication Media

Printed into different merchandise

Recognition

<https://www.instagram.com/p/DCoNPfHz2AU/?igsh=NHZjczFhaWV6MGFs>

Grants

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Additional

This project incorporates AI through the use of the ChatGPT platform (by OpenAI) to assist in generating translations and refining written content to improve clarity, save time, and ensure the accuracy of theoretical frameworks.