

# **VISUAL ANALYSIS: DESIGN CONFUSION OF CANNED ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES AMONGST MUSLIM CONSUMERS IN MALAYSIA**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Packaging design plays an important role to attract buyers. Several cases have been reported on the unintentional buying of canned alcoholic beverages by Muslims caused by the confusing packaging design between the alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages. Many studies on the development of packaging design for halal food products and halal beverages have been carried out. However, there is a lack of studies on alcoholic beverages in Malaysia because of the religious sensitivities in the matter of halal and haram. This research paper has aimed to define the confusing elements on alcoholic cans to help the Muslim consumers in recognising the canned alcoholic beverages effectively. A survey has been conducted to get the clarification from Muslim consumers on the confusing design elements. Based on the survey results, the visual analysis investigated the elements (pattern, colour, brand, images, and typography) to get the priority flow on how to recognise alcoholic beverages easily and effectively. The findings of the visual analysis are discussed in terms of the similarities in the design element from the principal display panel (PDP) of the cans.

## **Keywords:**

Visual Analysis, Canned Alcoholic Beverages, Packaging Design, Muslim Consumers

## **INTRODUCTION**

Nowadays, there is no form of communication that has a more profound impact on the mind and the thinking of individuals, people, and culture other than in the form of visual communication. As well, the use of visuals in the promotion of products can be seen as competing to be used by the designer currently in generating creativity. In the world of business, visual communication is one of the methods that are used to inform, to convey, to persuade, and to promote products or services. There are many types of visual communication that play an important role in helping to promote sales in the market place. For example, the use of print media as well as on the product label to provide clearer information to the buyers of a product description including images, logos, product names, and colours that are used to attract buyers. Besides helping and promoting sales in the market, the variety of visual communication in the promotion or product marketing can also affect the consumer's perception of psychology and attractions. According to Arnheim (2004), amongst the factors that are involved in stimulating the psychology in regards to the attraction and perception of things is the influence of colour, size, shape, position, and dynamic effects. Thus, it is seen that the proper and appropriate use of visual communication influences the psychological attraction and perception of target consumers and are able to contribute to the success of a promotion or marketing. In the context of the canned beverage market, the elements on the packaging are the main communication tool to the consumer. However, even with the use of labels confusion can still cause to them. Consumers will be confused by the wide selection of products with a wide range of excessive information on the products (Mitchell, Papavassiliou, 1999). This statement was supported

by Hausman (2000), who stated that consumers do not necessarily want to read the label every time they buy a particular product. Many users agree to the use of the label, but they are still not satisfied with the label format (PilanyaSilayoi, Mark Speece, 2004). In Malaysia, for the majority of Muslims, the confusion of alcoholic and non-alcoholic canned beverages is a serious issue because it involves religious sensitivities in the matter of halal and haram. According to the director of the Halal Hub Division in the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), Hajah Hakimah binti Mohd Yusof, the Halal industry is growing rapidly in Malaysia and Halal issues are current issues, but papers on this issue are very limited. Dr.Saadon Man (2014) encourages students and researchers to produce more articles, scholarly books, magazines, and journals related to Halal issues in national and international levels as well as to explain to the public with the right understanding, obviously, based on contemporary information. Islam is the official religion in Malaysia and alcohol is illegal in Islam (Alcohol Policy, 2004). Alcohol is also not advertised anywhere in the print media which mostly read by Muslims; but, it is permissible for non-Muslims, such as Chinese and Indians. However, Dr Siti Mariah Mahmud (2010) explains in detail that Malaysia was ranked as the tenth largest in the world in the consumption of alcohol. Although Malaysia has only 26 million people, its position is in the top ten in the world. Malaysians spend USD 500 million, which is about RM1.75 billion, for alcoholic beverages. Beer sales grow 5% to 7% per annum. It exceeds the population growth rate at 2.4% and the average age of the alcoholic drinker is 22 years. More and more teenagers have started taking alcoholic drinks, and 45% of Malaysian youth under the age of 18 consume alcohol regularly. All that data has shown that alcohol consumption by Muslims and Non-Muslims is continuing to increase in Malaysia (ArdiahJamali, Zaidah Mustapha, and Rokiah Ismail, 2009). Enforcement of alcohol sales is very weak and it is easy to find it in almost any grocery store throughout Malaysia. Kastam Act 1967, Section 2 (1) defines intoxicating liquor or alcohol as a liquid containing 2% proved alcohol or absolute alcohol. Section 32 (1) requires that, for the sale of intoxicating liquor, one must have a license, but Section 32 (1) (a) and (b) allow retail sales of beer or toddy in bottles or in cans, and does not require a license. Furthermore, (Mahmud, 2010) explains that the law holding the Excise Act says that beer can be sold if it do not exceed 27 litres. If one can of beer contains 350 millilitres, it means that a grocery store can save up to 77 cans of stock without requiring a license to sell it. In other words, all grocery stores throughout Malaysia can sell beer without a license. This situation has led the Muslim consumers to be easily exposed to the variety of alcoholic beverage products in the market place.

## **LITERATURE REVIEWS**

### **Packaging Design**

Packaging design is a combination of form, structure, materials, colour, imagery, typography, and information design elements which follow the rules to make it an ideal product to be marketed. The main objective of packaging design is to get a closer communication between the products and the consumers then selling it directly (Marianne R. Klimchuk, Sandra A. Krasovec, 2013). PolykovaKsenia (2013) found that the design of the packaging is very important for consumers in making a decision to purchase. Packaging helps users to evaluate a product during the purchasing process. He also conducted research on respondents from Russia and Germany, and found that they were more attracted to the colours, graphics or images, and product descriptions, while respondents from Finland and other countries were attracted to the shape of the packaging. However, other respondents from other countries recognised the product in terms of image elements and the name of the product itself. After a thorough researched, Polykova concluded that the visual elements on the packaging are the most important factors in the packaging of a product. Packaging elements, such as the graphics, colour, and description of the product, are paramount to the respondents.

### **Packaging Functions**

Packaging has multiple functions from various angles. It has the most important role in logistics and marketing because both of those connect the product to the end users (Ksenia, 2013). The main objective of packaging is to attract attention to the product to be sold, and then it can be stored; and it is also to protect the content (PilanyaSilayoi, Mark Speece, 2004). According to Gaafar Mohamed Abdalkrim and Ra'idSuleman Al-Hrezat (2013), the packaging serves as a tool to store, protect, and identify products during the production process, and to maintain product quality during shipment management to the destination and disposal sites. Due to increasing self-service and consumer and lifestyle changes nowadays, packaging plays an important role in promoting the products, and is the most important factor in influencing the decision to buy (Panwar, 2004).

### **Packaging as a Communication Tool**

The communicative function of packaging can be seen in four ways. Firstly, the packaging of products attracts users through the design and use of attractive colours. Secondly, the packaging gives information about its contents. Thirdly, the packaging can be a tool to educate consumers, and lastly, packaging is the entire image of a brand (Gutierrez, 2001). When given two types of the same product price and functionality, the target users will choose a more attractive looking product (Kotler, Ph., Rath, 1984). Through the study of VitalijaButkeviciene, JurgitaStravinskiene and AusraRutelione (2008), it was found that packaging has become a very effective communication tool because it meets all the consumers according to the category of the product. It is also effective because it communicates at the time when a user wants to make a buying decision. Users will be active in the communication process because users will see and examine the packaging to get the right information about the product. They found that there are two packaging components that play the role in the communication, which are verbal and non-verbal components of the package. The verbal package components are the name of the product, brand, producer, special offers and instructions of usage; whilst, the non-verbal components of the package are the form, size, colour, images, graphics, material, and smell. Through this theory, each element plays an important role and the package design is the biggest impact in the consumer decision-making process. At the behaviour purchase stage, the elements of the package inform the consumer as to how to use the product properly, influence quality evaluation whilst using the product, and they help to identify the product on the next repeated purchase. All the information on the packaging should be clear because the communication can be through the packaging directly or indirectly. Direct communication describes the product, advantages of the product and how to use it. Indirect communication uses colours, shapes, designs, and textures to convey the message and the concept of a product, such as originality, excitement, luxury, masculinity or femininity (Gutierrez, 2001).

### **Elements of packaging**

There are many different opinions on the classification of the packaging elements in the scientific literature. According to Paul Smith (2004), there are six variables that should be considered by manufacturers and designers when creating a successful packaging; these are shapes, sizes, colours, graphics, materials, and taste. Similarly, Kotler (2003) distinguishes six elements that should be evaluated when designing a packaging, which are size, shape, material, colour, text and brand. Vila (2007) and Underwood (2003) differentiate two types of packaging elements, which are graphical elements (colour, typography, forms used, and images) and structural elements (form, size of the container, and materials). The researcher found that both types of elements are similar to the classification of Paul Smith, Jonathan, and Taylor (2004) but do not include the verbal elements. Ruth Rettie and Carol Brewer (2000) also emphasize the importance of the correct positioning of the packaging elements. They divided the elements into two groups: verbal (e.g., brand slogan) and visual (visual persuasion, pictures, etc.). The elements of packaging have also been classified in the same way by VitalijaButkeviciene, JurgitaStravinskiene, AusraRutelione (2008). They differentiated between non-verbal elements of packaging (colour, shape, size, images, graphics, materials, and

smells) and verbal elements (product names, brands, producers, information, special offers, and instructions for use) in analysing the process of consumer decision-making. They classified the brand included as a verbal component, but Keller (2003) considers the packaging as one of the five elements of the brand, along with the name, logo, graphic symbols, personalities and slogans. However, VitalijaButkeviciene (2008) states that these two elements, verbal and non-verbal, are very important because these two elements provide useful information to users. According to PinyaSilayoi and Mark Speece (2007), packaging is divided into two elements, which are visual elements (graphics, colour, shape, and size) and the elements of information (the information provided and the technology). The author also mentioned that visual elements associated with the effectiveness in the process of consumer decision-making; whilst the information elements are associated with the cognitive process (process of learning and knowing). By this literature study, the researchers concluded that there are two types of elements identified, which are the visual and verbal elements. Reading analysis classifies that graphics, colour, size, shape, and material are visual elements; whilst information of the product, manufacturer, country of origin, and brand are considered as verbal elements.

### Alcohol Labelling On Packaging Design

In Malaysian law, all alcoholic beverages are required to label the alcohol content on the main display panel with each word being capitalised, characterised by non-serif (sans-serif), font size not less than 12 points, and the word "ARAK MENGANDUNGI \_\_\_\_% ALKOHOL" (Dzulkifly, 2012) (Refer to Figure 1). However, the researchers found that those conditions only applied to the locally manufactured products. For imported products, there is no standard labelling policy for alcohol content labelling on the packaging. As a result, the label is often too small and confuses the buyers. Differences of font size and labelling placement will cause it to be difficult to be seen by buyers.



Fig. 1: Alcohol labelling for local canned alcoholic beverages

### Alcoholic Beverage Placement

According to one term in the alcoholic beverage sale as prescribed by the Malaysian government through Excise / Bia license, liquor should be separated from other food items (Ukhwah, 2004). Separation of alcoholic drinks from soft drinks must be clear so that it does not confuse the buyer. On 29 January 2009, the Malaysian Association of Community Development of Mechanism (MACOM) called on the public to sign a petition to urge supermarkets across the country separating the liquor products from the shelves that have Halal products. This call was due to the report from the public who complained that they were not comfortable with the actions of some supermarket operators who were not sensitive to the composition of the products sold.

### Prohibition of Alcoholic Drinks for Muslims

The act of drinking liquor is a criminal offense under the hudud criminal category based on the provisions of the criminal law of Islam (Jasri Jamal, Noryati Maher, 2012). According to El-Awa (1998) and Ismail (1996), the prohibition on liquor for Muslims is not just the act of drinking but also

includes any activity that promotes the act of consuming alcohol, such as producing, distributing, selling, keeping or buying alcohol. The punishment provided under hudud laws for alcohol consumption amongst Muslims is whipping. For non-Muslims, there is no prohibition for those involved with alcohol or liquor-related activities as long as they are not intoxicated and endanger the safety and public order. They are entitled to implement the law, including their own personal connection with the acquisition and sale of alcohol. However, the flexibility given to non-Muslims about liquor must be subject to the procedures, restrictions and Islamic law (Jasri Jamal, Noryati Maher, 2012). In Malaysia, of which the majority of its citizens are Muslims, liquor advertising, directly, is not allowed in the print media and billboards, except in Sabah. However, advertising is allowed in the cinema, video cassette and print media. Sponsorship by manufacturers and sellers of alcoholic beverages are allowed and there are many tactics used by the alcohol industry to market the drinks in Malaysia (ArdiahJamali, Zaidah Mustapha, and Rokiah Ismail, 2009).

### **PROBLEM STATEMENTS**

The visual design on the packaging is intended to attract users to a product. However, for a Muslim-majority country, confusion in distinguishing between alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages is a serious issue because it involves the sensitivity of Muslims. An article on 15 November 2013 showed the occurrence of the confusion cases when several mart employees admitted mistakenly arranging fruit canned drinks with alcohol at the same place (Sinar Harian, 2013). According to the article, some of the customers got interested in the canned beer because the visual element on the packaging design looked like a carbonated lemon drink. In another case, a student was caught when trying to bring canned alcoholic drinks into the school area. Following the case, the teacher also expressed dissatisfaction because the wrapper pack design was confusing teachers and schools officials. Two days later, SinarHarian (2013) released another article entitled "*Rekagrafik tin minuman keras kelirukan pembeli*", which clearly told about the confusion of Muslim consumers with the graphic design on alcoholic cans that resemble regular non-alcoholic drinks. According to Harian Metro (2010), the Consumers Association of Penang (CAP) found that there were more than 15 types of alcoholic drinks on the market that appeared to be soft drinks thus confusing the public. The president of CAP had mentioned that manufacturers use the very attractive colour, which certainly influences the consumers, especially children and teenagers, to try it and will cause them to be addicted to drink alcohol. The same case happened in 1997 when Alcopops or lemonade soda alcoholic(4%-5%) drinks were sold in Malaysia with an attractive colourful packaging design, cartoon drawing, and a brand name that was easy to remember by teenagers (ArdiahJamali, Zaidah Mustapha, and Rokiah Ismail, 2009). According to one of the conditions of the sale of alcohol as prescribed by the Malaysian government through Eksais / Bia license, liquor should be separated from other food stuff (Ukhwah, 2004) However, early observations found that the condition has been ignored by many premises that sell alcoholic beverages and no enforcement is undertaken. Mohd Kassim Sulaiman noted that even after many issues regarding these alcoholic cans were exposed in social media, still many villagers who are less exposed to the internet remain confused (Sinar Harian, 2013). When alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages are mixed in the same place, buyers will only rely on visual elements that are available on the cans to distinguish amongst them. According to Dr Siti Mariah Mahmud (2010), studies on the issue of alcoholic beverages are not carried out much by government institutions, whether hospitals or universities because it is said to be sensitive to those Malay Muslims.



Fig. 2: Mixed placement of alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The mixed method has become a popular term by mixing qualitative and quantitative data in a study. According to Creswell (2003), the mixed method can be used to understand a research problem and it is better than using only a single research method to get a more detailed perspective of the issue. In this study, the researchers used mixed methods to achieve two objective studies in the first and second stages of the research. In stage 1, the quantitative method was applied to determine the existing problem from the consumer by using a questionnaire survey. In stage 2, the quantitative analysis of visual data conducted to get the similarity elements on the alcoholic cans. Finally, in stage 3, the researchers interview ten of expert graphic designers to ensure the validity of the visual analysis data in term of expert verification in qualitative method.

### Stage 1 – Questionnaires survey

The focus respondents in this research were from the Muslim community in Malaysia. The research instruments that have been used were questionnaires, which were distributed to 50 female and 50 male respondents at the sampling area. The questionnaire design was adapted from the design analysis grid by Kristen Guthrie (2008). The purposive sampling was chosen for the questionnaire survey and the samples' purpose was aimed at Muslims, ages 18 and above, and for those walking past the front of the alcoholic beverage shelf area. The reason for these purposive respondents was the issue being definitely towards the Muslim consumers and most of the previously related alcoholic issue studies mentioned that this issue is a sensitive part of the Malaysian community. This research has focused on respondents aged eighteen years and above because of their purchasing power, and sellers cannot sell alcoholic drinks to any person under the age of eighteen years old (Dzulkifly, 2012). According to the Journal of Malaysian and Comparative Law, eighteen years old is categorised as adult, and It was very important to ensure that this research got a serious answer and feedback from the opinion and thought of an adult. The sampling area for the survey distribution was in front of the alcoholic beverage shelf sales in the Jusco AEON shopping mall at Bukit Raja, Klang. The respondents could see, directly, the visual elements of the canned beer packaging at the same time they answered the questionnaire. In this way, the result of the survey was more accurate than with the use of the imagination to answer the question. According to Oppenheim (1992), the accuracy of the sample is more important compared to the large number of samples that require much higher costs. The researchers chose this location to conduct the questionnaire survey because it is the focal point for urban people and students in Klang and Shah Alam. The researchers also did an observation on product placement and recorded it for any spontaneous feedback from the respondents during the questionnaire survey session.

### Stage 2 – Visual Analysis

The quantitative analysis of visual data was selected as a method in this research to examine the similarity of the elements on the canned beverage packaging. This method was adapted from the

innovative method of analysing data presented in images from the book of “Making, Selling and Wearing Boys' Clothes in Late-Victorian England”, written by Clare Rose in 2010. The author also produced a research paper clearly describe about the method extension from her book with entitled “Quantitative Analysis of Visual Data as Evidence”. A visual analysis can be achieved by analysis of single images or collections of images. The visual analysis may include the analysis of a text, words or images as one indivisible unit of analysis (Theo Van Leeuwen, Carey Jewitt, 2001). All the collected PDP images of alcoholic cans around the Klang area had been categorised by the type of alcoholic drinks and the confusing elements had been analysed based on the priority from the survey result. The analysis was conducted to measure the percentage of the similar elements through the clustering and classification of the alcoholic cans’ PDP images.

### Stage 3 –Interviews

The researchers obtained the data verification from the open ended interview session with ten expert graphic designers. All the visual analysis data had been checked by the respondents and some amendments have been made based on their expert opinion.

## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

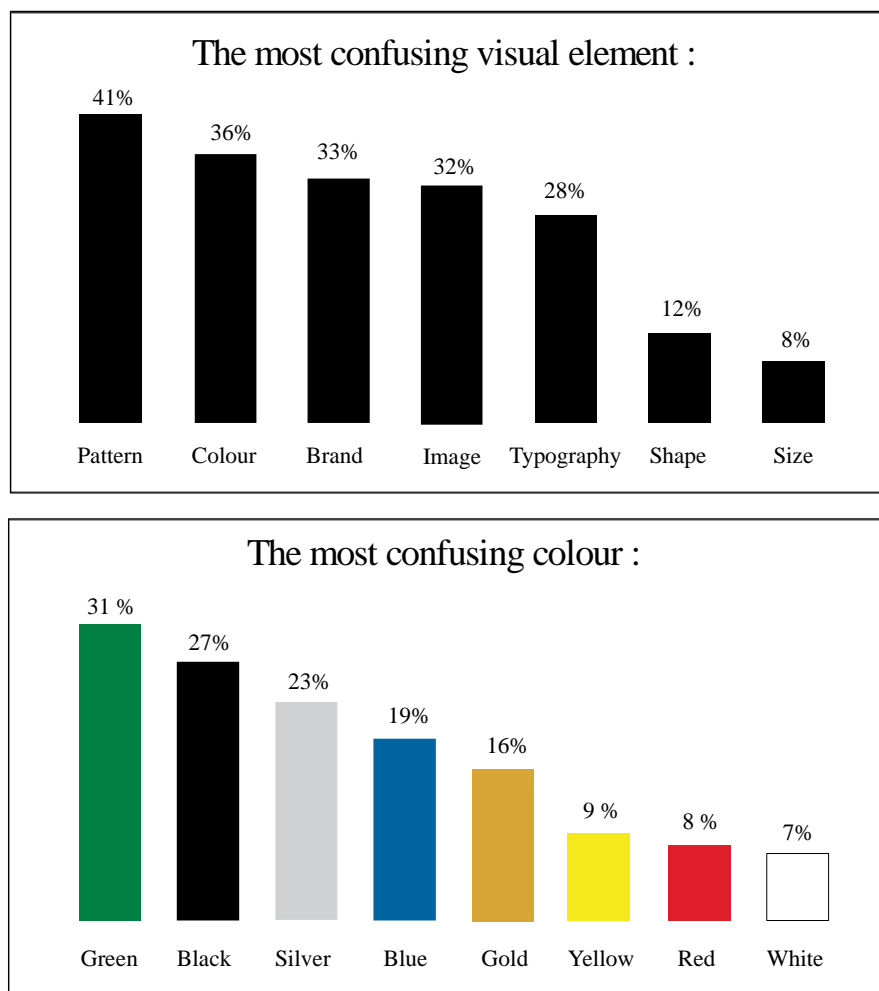


Fig.3: Survey results

The results in Figure 3 showed that the most confusing elements to the respondents were the pattern on the cans, followed by the colour, brand, images, typography, shape and size. Based on the data and the literature reviews, it shows that the design pattern and colour give a high influence to

the consumer in purchasing activities. The green colour is the most confusing colour to the respondents and it is followed by black and silver. 86% of the respondents stated that the alcohol content label on the cans was difficult to read and it proved that the label was not helping the consumer to recognise the alcoholic cans effectively. Based on the survey data, the researchers analysed all the collected PDP images in order to bring all the dominant elements of the packaging design into several categories of similarities. Amongst the similar elements that had been analysed were images, patterns, colours, material, typography and shape.

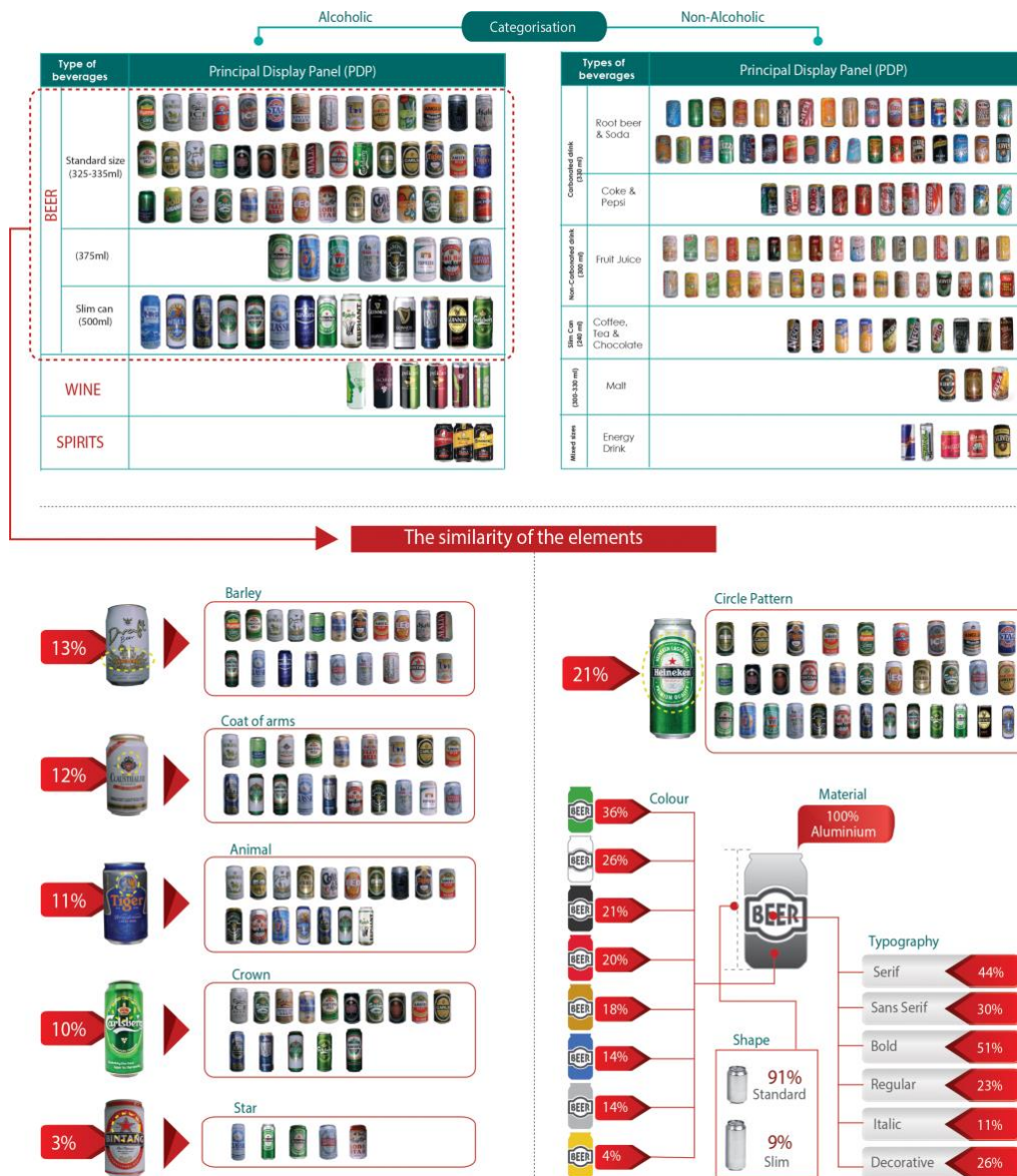


Fig. 4: Visual Analysis of the similarity of the elements

Figure 4 has shown all the analysis percentages of the similar elements. The analysis began with the categorisation of collected PDP can images. Totally, 64 of beer can were collected around Klang area to be analysed. All percentages given are based on a similar amount of the overall beer can images. Analysis of the graphic image found that the most commonly found was the barley image, which was followed by the coat of arms, animal, crown, and star. The most similar colour for beer cans was green and the most similar pattern was the circle shape of the pattern on the PDP surface of the beer cans. The whole of the beer cans were made from the same material, which was aluminium. Most of the beer cans used the serif and bold characters of typography. The majority of the beer cans were



manufactured with the standard can shape (325ml-335ml) rather than the slim shape (500ml and above).

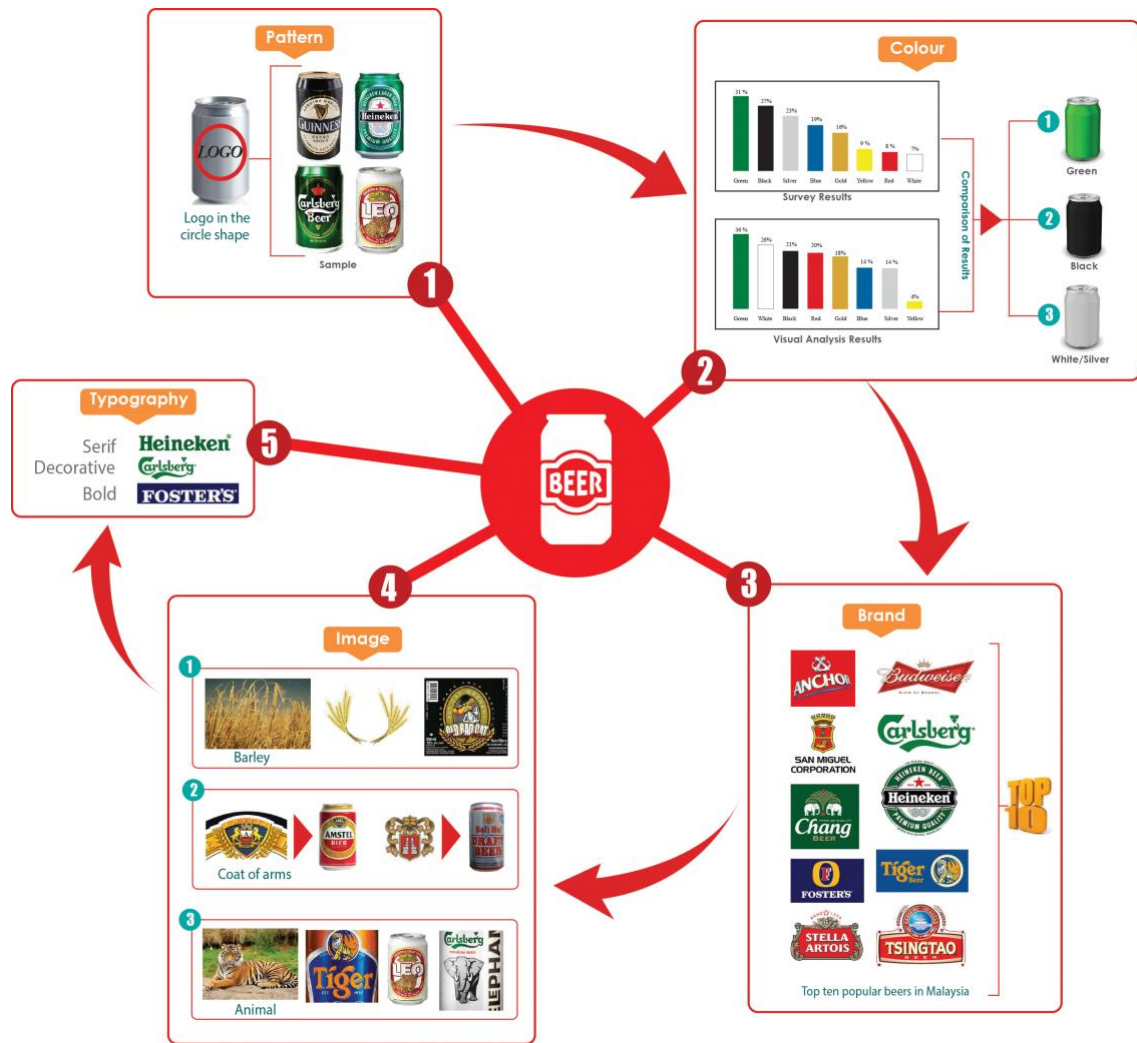


Fig.5: Five-step on how to recognise canned alcoholic beverages

The figure shows the findings from the integration data of this research. There is a five-step guideline for Muslim consumers on how to recognise canned alcoholic beverages, especially for canned beer. The quantitative data from the respondents show that there are five elements that are confusing; they are pattern, colour, brand, Image, and typography. Each of the elements have been analysed through the visual analysis to find the similarity that can help the consumer to be aware of each of the recognised elements. The quantitative result shows that the most similar pattern is the circle shape on the PDP of the cans. The data from the respondents and visual analysis also show the similarity of the three highest confusing colours, which is, green is the most similar colour on beer cans, followed by black and white or silver. Based on the online survey from the Lowyat forum in 2010, there are ten top brands of beer that Muslim consumers need to be aware because they can easily be found in the market; these are Anchor, Budweiser, Carlsberg, Chang, Heineken, Tiger, Tsingtao, Stella Artois, Fosters and San Miguel. Analysis of the images found that the highest similarity of the images on beer cans is barley; this is followed by coat of arms and animal. The last confusing element is the typography. The analysis found that the most similar obvious character on the typography is serif; followed by decorative and bold.

## CONCLUSION

Through this study, the researchers have managed to analyse and define the confusing elements on the alcoholic cans that are available in local markets. Data were collected from the experts, books, journals, and articles, and by reading, surveying, observing, and analysing the existing subject matter that leads to the problems. This research has found that there are five elements that confuse the Muslim consumers in differentiating between the alcoholic and non-alcoholic cans. In order to help the Muslim consumers, this research has produced a five-step guideline on how to recognise canned alcoholic beverages in sequences starts from the design pattern, followed by colours, brands, images, and typography. Overall, it is hoped that this research will encourage other local researchers to stand out and investigate this relevant issue that had always been thought of as a sensitive issue in Malaysia before this.

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