

## **Sustaining Batik Craft Design in Malaysia using Indigenous Creative Knowledge**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper attempts to identify creative indigenous knowledge where emotions are translated into unique and innovative batik design. It is well documented that batik designers use imagery and styles based on their environment, cultural experience and cultural objects. The very fact that batik making has survived and developed as a form of modern art and craft demonstrates its popularity and resilience. The paper creates a batik model that is a product of identity. The 'IK' (Indigenous Knowledge) creativity is unique as incorporates both traditional and modern elements in batik designs leading to sustainable batik craft in contemporary Malaysia.

*Keywords:* Batik design, creativity, indigenous knowledge, sustainable craft, traditional and modern

### **INTRODUCTION**

Cultural craft product such as batik is both an art and a craft which has been in existence for centuries. Batik is a wax resist dyeing technique used on textiles and a part of Malay sartorial culture.

However, in Malaysia as a melting pot of various distinct cultures, diverse craft products are made using a wide variety of materials (e.g. wood, rattan, textile, leather, ceramics, etc.). In ensuring its continued existence and sustainability, it is imperative to have a strategy. Cultural idiosyncrasies, human creativity, technological innovation, natural environment are the main inspirations behind local batik designs and their production.

These craft designs based on a community's peculiarity was inherited from early times but it has witnessed a

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development in design due to globalisation (Fred, 2000). Some communities preserve their cultural peculiarity in producing traditional batik designs and products, and there are those who are interested in contemporary craft designs and souvenirs. From design perspective, community-based industry can be defined as industry producing products based on its cultural resources (e.g. symbol and images derived from communal religious beliefs, peculiar behaviour, and prevalent values) and or natural resources or hereditary craftsmanship of particular community.

Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the fundamental discourse on community-based industry is all about culture (Peter, 1997). The tradition of batik is fluid and contemporary. Thus, all these approaches have led to creative knowledge based on art and culture.

### **Cultural Values in Batik**

Culture is defined as a set of customs, values and traditions and a way of life in society. It is made up of socio-cultural interactions, traditions, artefacts and development of trends in society. A cultural product is based on its semiotic and semantic context and needs (Julier, 2000). In batik, the indigenous skills and local expertise were transferred inherited from generations without having any institutionalised grounds. Within these cultural values, the artefacts survived and robust cultural identity is produced. In design terms, the dynamic entity of culture could be perceived from two approaches: The first is culture as an entity at the level of

ideas, such as: symbolic belief, world views and ideology (anthropologist approach), and; the second is that culture as an entity in more concretely, the level of attitude, such as: activities, object and its visual or physical performance (Mean, 2008). These two approaches are endless in their subtle differences, but they may be drawn into two lines with each tip representing the fundamental cultural aspect, such as spiritual, ideological, activity, and material aspect.

The spiritual aspect consists of the community's religious beliefs, symbolic myths, and prevalent transcendental ideas. This aspect targets the value of "goodness" and affirms the proper place of human beings in the spiritual and natural order of the world (Baudrillard, 1998). Ideological aspect is grounded in the agency action. This aspect supports human beings in the accomplishment of their intentions in obtaining the value of "useful". Within these parameters, batik had created a unique identity through its semantic and semiotic approaches.

The tradition of batik is constantly evolving through creation of new images and designs. Thus, all these approaches lead to creative knowledge extension within the respective values of art and culture. Accordingly, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Crafts Council (WCC), and Aid to Artisans (ATA) have made efforts to bring traditional craft into the mainstream life. Such efforts include engaging designers to work with

artisan groups to develop fresh product lines for emerging and new markets. The popularity of batik is attributed to its materials; its colourful appearance and its functionality. The materials support physical and psychological needs of human beings in targeting the value of “pleasure”. This is related to visual appearance or physical performance with psychological perception. To some extent, this aspect is also assumed as an opposition to moral responsibility. The souvenirs made from batik for instance are often appreciated as pleasurable object, and which meet the needs of foreigner, but the cultural meaning of the object is lost.

Batik represents a cultural heritage and a creative creation of value with innovative experiences apparent at every level; aesthetics, productive, distributive, technological and educational. Therefore, batik has both tangible and intangible

cultural heritage which displays a harmony between traditional knowledge or indigenous knowledge, skills and modern technology. Batik as a tangible cultural heritage can be explained as work of art that consists of the beauty of nature as a dominant character; while as an intangible cultural heritage, it portrays the semiotic of its oral traditions and expressions and traditional knowledge through its functional artefacts. Batik as product of identity needs more intellectual input and multinational cultural input. In creating an outstanding design culture when developing batik images, there has to be a strong connection between designer, environment, production and consumption (Figure 1). In this sense, batik can meet the standard of quality and appreciation in the global market. This is where the cultural values and creative knowledge become crucial.

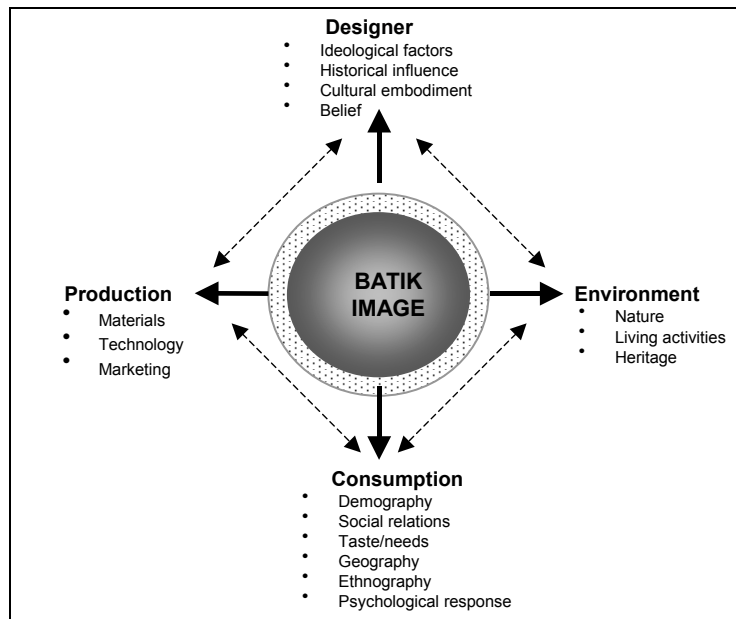


Figure 1. Domains of design culture in batik

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Representational of IK Creativity

This paper posits that creative knowledge can be built through robust integration of theory and praxis informed by an environmental ethos. Such creative praxis will enhance commercial batik productivity. This paradigm shift is made possible by innovations in batik product appearance and technology. Batik goods based on material cultural aspect can portray IK creativity and product identity through indigenous knowledge, inspiration and environmental influence. Therefore, this type of batik design is able to interact within society and at the same time showcase innovative concepts.

Intellectual concepts will enhance the capacity of batik designers and manufacturers in representing its value, identity and sense of a culture. Creating Indigenous knowledge (IK) will enhance marketability, effectiveness and sustainability of batik products (Figure 2). Expression of emotions

is largely universal, but there are subtle differences across cultures that can create a challenge for effective communication (Elfenbein & Ambady, 2003). The ability to translate indigenous knowledge in the batik world with more intellectual concepts will enhance the capacity and sustainability of batik in representing its value, identity and sense of a culture in social interactions. Indigenous knowledge (IK) creativity is aimed at improving the popularity and sustainability of batik products (Figure 2). From a design perspective, the indigenous people have developed and passed their indigenous knowledge from generations aligned with the purpose of their existence. This IK is embedded in community practices, relationships and rituals. It is essentially a tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge that enhance product appearance. It has been documented that IK creativity is the basis of indigenous knowledge, identity, inspiration, influence, interaction and innovation. These components will form a significant domain in batik design culture.

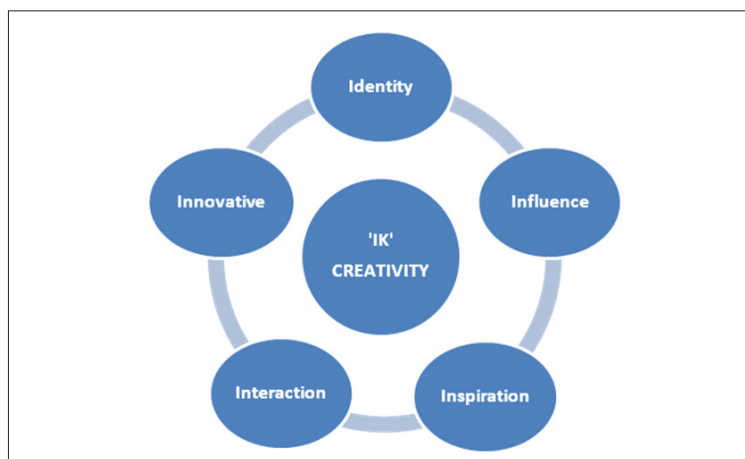


Figure 2. IK creative components

The IK creativity is a solution for creating better batik designs that evoke a sense of pleasure, with its aesthetic and innovative quality, combining different materials and decorative batik motifs. It is related to person, process and the product (Figure 3). So, by considering the characteristic of IK creativity, it has been possible to come up with a unique Malaysian batik identity. Process, materials and creative skill in craftwork play a major role in creating a good design and batik appearance. A successful Malaysian batik product such as batik craft can be defined by its content through the use of local motif and materials. Thus, a strong batik profile will 'interact' with its users by presenting innovative elements in each creation. This creativity is the application of knowledge

and skills in new ways to achieve good products. Creativity is a process of relating, connecting and sometimes adding ideas to what is not previously thought of. In order to develop quality batik products, creative designers or makers should possess four key qualities:

- Ability to identify new problems rather than depending on others to define them
- Ability to transfer knowledge in various contexts depending on the situation and needs
- A belief in learning as incremental process, in which repeated attempts will eventually lead to success
- The capacity to focus attention in the pursuit of goals.

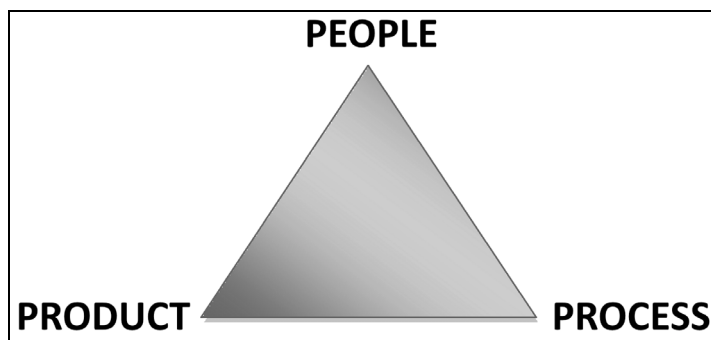


Figure 3. Aspect in creativity

Skills and creative knowledge in batik making have become increasingly important to project the uniqueness of batik. As today's batik represents a fusion of tradition and modernity, an innovative approach is key to a successful batik business. The success

of any batik design is gauged ultimately by sustaining its identity and projecting its unique motif. A key to sustaining the batik culture is synergy between creative indigenous knowledge and modern business skills. This creativity will help to create

a unique product (Malaysian) identity. It is important to extend this knowledge as this creative thinking for better product evolution and development.

The IK creativity is a solution to design better batik products that evoke a sense of pleasure, aesthetic and innovativeness with a good combination of different materials and special batik motifs. It is related to a person, process and the product (Figure 3). So, by considering the characteristic of IK creativity, it is possible to point to indicators of batik identity. It is termed as analytic-intrinsic orientation and holistic-extrinsic orientation.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The medium of home grown expression was set to boom across the archipelago and the world as artists enthusiastically welcomed the possibilities offered through batik. Therefore, it is imperative in the era of globalisation that creativity is employed. The IK creativity can be used as a basic platform for batik designs. It is a key that opens the door to improve batik images and creating new ideas and useful things. IK Creativity is found to be a process of relating, connecting and sometimes adding ideas to what is not previously thought of. In this section, a cultural model based on the perception of batik artefact is proposed as follows:

### **Memory**

Long term memory will ensure cultural rules are rigid and do not change over time. On the other hand, cultural priorities and

other cultural stereotypes are short-term memories which can change overtime. The affective artefact creates a strong connection between the emotion of the designer, story and the user.

### **Cultural needs**

Culture can be defined as emerging from the needs of the individuals that inhabit a specific culture. For example, an individual belonging to an individualistic culture will have high needs for uncertainty avoidance and competence and a lower need for affiliation.

### **Identity**

Collectivistic cultures emphasise community, collaboration, shared interests, harmony, traditions and public good. It involves a range of cultural complexities and cultural realities. Cultural identities are influenced by factors such as religion, ancestry, skill, aesthetics, beliefs, family and history. These factors contribute to the development of one's identity and self-expression.

### **Hierarchy**

Members of high power distance cultures see power as a basic fact in society or organisations that communicate with each other.

### **Aesthetics**

Aesthetics plays an important role in the evolutionary trend of design as the design

of objects are important in shaping culture and impacting people's lives in far-reaching ways. In a neuro-psychological point of view, aesthetic experience touches on cognition and emotion — inciting our sense of judgment and influencing our behaviour. Hence, the aesthetic perception as a *Kansei* or sensory factor and an emotive cognition in the construction of products' values and hence propose that this phenomenon traverses all layers of product experience in both intrinsic and extrinsic ways, despite cultural distinctions. A holistic view of aesthetics using three levels of experience includes superficial, functional and symbolic dimensions of aesthetics will ensure batik survival and evolution. The art of batik shall survive and with cyclical fashion trends, it may be popular again. IK creativity can be used as a basic platform in batik designs. Emotions play a significant role in the actual and perceived experience of products. They shape the quality of interaction with a product in the user's environment and relate directly to the appraisal the latter's experience. Users generate emotion as a way to minimise errors, interpret functionality, or obtain relief from the complexity of a task. As a user appraises a product, they may develop new concerns that cause them to alter their task exploration, seek or solicit help, or begin another task in order to gain

confidence before completing the more difficult task. Emotion acts as a cognitive artefact in task achievement and is central to how other artefacts are interpreted and how pleasure is perceived. It also plays a valuable role in sense making and impacts how users interpret explore and perceive the artefact. The artefacts that embody affective properties are valuable design criteria. It can help to improve batik designs by creating new ideas.

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