

## **Integrating *Asma ul Husna* Values for Design Excellence**

**Nor Ziratul Aqma Norzaman<sup>1,2</sup>, Nazlina Shaari<sup>1</sup>,  
Khairul Aidil Azlin Abd. Rahman<sup>1\*</sup>, Nangkula Utaberta<sup>3</sup> and  
Jazmin Mohamad Jaafar<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Department of Industrial Design, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), 43400 Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia

<sup>2</sup>Department of Industrial Design, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin UniSZA), 21300 Kuala Terengganu, Terengganu, Malaysia

<sup>3</sup>Department of Architecture, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), 43400 Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia

<sup>4</sup>Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia

### **ABSTRACT**

A good design fulfils consumer needs and wants in an increasingly competitive world. However, humans do not realise the fact that the pursuit of perfection and sophistication in order to satisfy their needs and wants have gradually pulled them away from pursuing the ultimate objective in life: seeking Allah's pleasure. In this case, most individuals have their own perception and judgement of what is a good design. However, most of the outlined criteria are user-centred with quite a contrasting idea to that of the Islamic perspective that urges human being to become a caliph and at the same time, obtain the benefits of the hereafter as outlined in the Al-Quran. Hence, there is a need to improve the existing design criteria so that they can benefit mankind in accordance with Allah's will. This is a review of theories and definition of "good design" to explain the need to integrate integrating *Asma ul Husna* values into "design excellence principles".

*Keywords:* *Asma ul Husna* values, design excellence, design process, good design, humanity, Muslim perspective

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*E-mail addresses:*

ziratul\_aqma@yahoo.com (Nor Ziratul Aqma Norzaman)  
drkhairulazlin@gmail.com (Khairul Aidil Azlin Abd. Rahman)  
nazlinashaari@upm.edu.my (Nazlina Shaari)  
nangkula\_arch@yahoo.com (Nangkula Utaberta)  
jazminjaafar@gmail.com (Jazmin Mohamad Jaafar)

\* Corresponding author

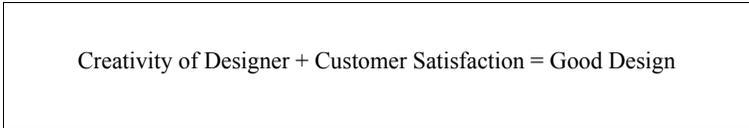
### **INTRODUCTION**

In order to remain competitive and capture a significant amount of market share, entrepreneurs and designers must be able to entice consumers to consume their goods or services. This can be realised through the application of good design. Dieter

Rams stated that a “good design” should be user-centred and fulfils these ten criteria: innovative, useful, aesthetic, unobtrusive, honest, long lasting, environmental friendly, thorough (down to the last detail), comprehensible, and simple. It is undeniable that the theory of good design enables users to lead a better life and encourage a healthy spirit of competition among entrepreneurs in order to produce sustainable products for the consumer. However, there is a possibility of Muslim consumers materialising every single item that they consume and not acknowledging their ultimate purpose in this life, which is to seek Allah’s blessings. This study therefore discusses the benefits of integrating *Asma ul Husna* values into design excellence principles.

## DEFINITION OF GOOD DESIGN

There are various theoretical and practical interpretations of good design and one of them is from the Design Council (2007) that defines “good design” as a kind of design that can improve product competitiveness, keeps consumers satisfied and happy, and implies the power of brand, especially if consumers remain loyal to the brand and recommend it to others. Gardiner and Rothwell (1985) posited that a good design is a result of the creativity of designers and how a particular product is able to please the consumer. In other words, a good design is simply a part of providing good product to end-users.



Creativity of Designer + Customer Satisfaction = Good Design

Figure 1. Formula of good design

The is consistent with Hertenstein, Platt and Veryzer (2013) who argued that a good design consists of several attributes which are subject to different demographic factors, market segments, and individual judgments. Two themes prevail here company related and customer related.

Nowadays, centralising “human wants” is a norm in product design. Hicks (2014) emphasised that the ultimate aim of production is to produce what consumer’s want and not what the companies want. This is consistent with the Double Diamond design process introduced by Design Council (2007).

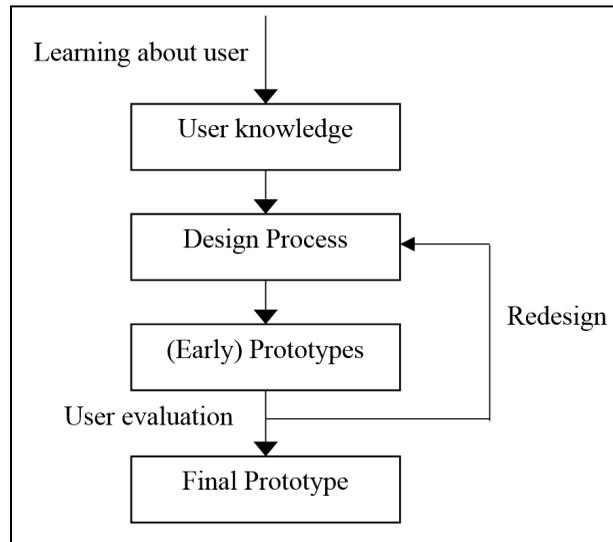


Figure 2. Design Process by Marion A. Hersh (2010)

Churchill and Surprenant (1982), Hersh (2010), Karadeniz (2010), and Keith (1960) state that business is all about customer. This article highlights the importance of customer-focused strategies in maximising brand equity and raising its value. Their study also claimed that user-centred design is the best approach. This article focuses on fulfilling human wants where we know human wants will never stop and which deviates from Allah’s pleasure as mentioned in the Quran surah at-Takathur, 102:1. Therefore, this study will focus on centralising Allah in every aspect of consumer consideration.

### MATERIALISTIC WORLD

Humans always strive for more in their lives. Therefore, designers always give priority on what consumers want rather than what is actually better for society. Becker (2013) described “human wants” as never-ending as

they are obsessed with material well-being – this known as “*ad-dunya*” in Arabic. In this sense, several related verses from the Al-Quran are cited as follows:

*“You are obsessed by greed for more and more.”*

(Surah At-Takathur, 102:1)

According to Sirgy (1998), there are two types of human beings: materialists and non-materialists. Kasser and Kanner (2004) revealed that human beings have a different set of beliefs, practices, attitudes, and behaviours due to their different upbringing and childhood development. Ryan and Dziurowiec (2001) said materialism leads to the highest level of life satisfaction while Richins and Dawson (1992) believed that materialism can still make individuals feel unhappy or discontented with the conditions of their lives. From the Islamic perspective,

the following verses from Al-Quran reminds the Muslims that this world is temporary and hence, they are not supposed to let themselves be drowned in materialism and deceived by their worldly possessions.

*“The life of the world is nothing but a game and a diversion. The abode of the hereafter that is truly life if they only knew.”*

(Surah Al-Ankabut, 29:64)

### **ASMA UL HUSNA: A SPIRITUAL REMEDY FOR GREEDINESS**

According to Ahmet and Akdogan (2012), an individual is able to accomplish inner peace and satisfaction by having a strong faith in Allah. This refers to believing in the existence and oneness of Allah (*tawheed*) and Muhammad is His last Messenger. It is one of the pillars in Islam that is encapsulated through the expression of *shahadah*. The following verse from Al-Quran confirms that individuals can offer gratitude and seek satisfaction by remembering Allah always.

*“Those who believed, and whose hearts find satisfaction in the remembrance of Allah: for without doubt in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find satisfaction.”*

(Surah Ar-R’ad 13:28)

Besides *shahadah* which represents the core of Islamic creed, the remembrance of Allah is also possible through the practice of meditation (*zikr-i-Ilahi*). Ahmad (2003) posited that a constant verbal repetition in the form *zikr-i-Ilahi* can bring individuals closer to Allah. In this sense, the recitation of names and attributes of Allah (*Asma ul Husna*) may help Muslims improve on their daily religious rituals and practices, besides encouraging them to perform good deeds.

### **CORE VALUE OF ASMA UL HUSNA**

When a Muslim knows and remembers the names and attributes of Allah, he or she will progressively gain more knowledge about Him, stay closer to His supreme being, and eventually reflect upon the reasons and purposes of this life and the afterlife. This helps individuals to understand the world is temporary and there is only one thing that everyone should be doing in this life: worshipping Allah in their daily routines. To this end, the core value of *Asma ul Husna* is to enlighten the spirit of Muslims and to permit them into accepting the “oneness of Allah” wholeheartedly. This is one of the attributes of a caliph in this world.

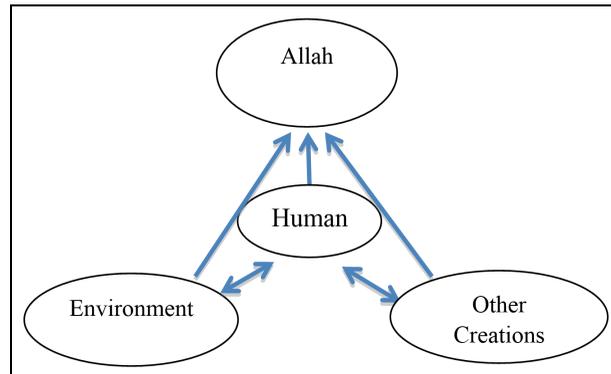


Figure 3. Responsibility of a caliph

Figure 3 shows the responsibilities of human beings towards the environment and other creations for the sake of seeking Allah’s pleasure. Allah has purposely created human being to become the vicegerent (caliph) in this world, while His other creations in this universe are entrusted upon human beings, for example animal, plant, and environment. In this sense, a designer is not just a professional who earns a living, but a caliph who is also responsible to create something beneficial for society through his or her excellent design.

### EXCELLENT DESIGN

This study shows human wants and need are primary in producing Good Design and it leads to materialism, hindering the individual from seeking the true purpose of human existence. It will be beneficial if designers can facilitate human beings in pursuing Allah’s pleasure through their design. We can term it as Excellent Design; one step ahead of Good Design.

$$\text{Creativity of Designer} + \text{Customer Satisfaction} + \text{Allah's Pleasure} = \text{Excellent Design}$$

Figure 4. Formula of Excellent Design

Design criteria are the main guidelines in product design, and a good set of design criteria will help designers to successfully establish “user acceptance”. However,

without a proper guidance based on religious principles, a good design may not be able to benefit humankind. Thus, it is important for designers to develop a design excellence

principle via the integration of *Asma ul Husna* that may bring users closer to Allah.

### DESIGN EXCELLENCE PRINCIPLE

Abbas and Razak (2011) described the concept of human nature in their paper,

where they emphasise that men are created by Allah in the best form and positioned at the highest level of hierarchy of creation as they are endowed with intelligence (*aql*). Intelligence is a precious gift from Allah that other creations do not possess.

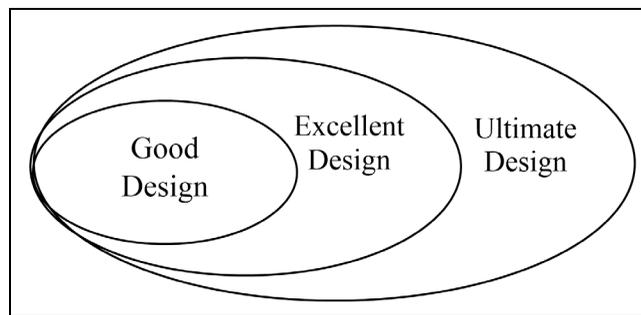


Figure 5. Hierarchy of creation

In this sense, although human beings are endowed with exceptional talents, abilities, and wisdom compared with other creations, they are not equated with Allah creations for He is the almighty Creator (*Al-Khaaliq*), the Inventor (*Al-Baari*), and the Fashioner (*Al-Musawwir*) – among the 99 names of Allah.

*“He is Allah, the Creator, the Inventor, the Fashioner; to Him belong the best names. Whatever is in the heavens and earth is exalting Him. And He is the Exalted in Might, the Wise.”*

(Surah Al-Hashr, 59:24)

This paper proposes to integrate Islamic creed (*tawheed*) via the name of Allah (*Asma ul Husna*) into the design excellence

principles. Some of the main reasons for having excellent design criteria are: the products should make users at ease and encourage and motivate the Muslims to perform *ibadah* (religious practices and rituals) in their daily lives. To that end, human beings must accept the fact that their abilities are limited and perfection is unattainable. Therefore, product creation must not be overdone to an extent where human beings neglect their responsibilities as the vicegerents in this world and forget to worship Allah.

In a nutshell, design excellence principle is an improvised version of the existing good design concept. Design excellence principle is created based on the core value of *Asma ul Husna*. It is hoped that this effort is considered as *ibadah* to Allah.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Literature review has discussed the integration of *Asma ul Husna* into design excellence principles. It sets the foundation of applicable concepts and theories in the process of determining the best design excellence principles. However, this area needs to be extensively explored in the future as a continuation to the present study, which includes establishing a link between the proposed theory (integrating *Asma ul Husna* into the design excellence principles) and the criteria of Good Design Award.

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