
Illustration Mascot of Pecel Kane as an Promotional Media

Bagas Galang Bijaky^{1*}, Yogi Widya Saka Warsaa²

^{1,2}Visual Communication Design Malang Asia Institute Of Technology And Business, Jl. Soekarno Hatta – Rembeksari No. 1A, Mojolangu, Lowokwaru District, Malang City, East Java 65113, Indonesia.

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***Correspondence Email:**
bagasgalangbijaky@gmail.com

Abstract

Pecel Kane is one of the micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) participating in the “Tumbas Mbois” program created by the Lowokwaru District government, Malang City in strengthening local business branding. The promotion carried out by Pecel Kane is still simple and does not display a strong visual identity, so a more creative and effective communication strategy is needed. This study aims to design the visual identity of Pecel Kane through mascot illustrations using the design thinking methodology which includes 5 stages starting from Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype, and Test, each stage contains methods adapted to research and design to testing. The design process combines several keywords related to Pecel Kane, especially the local cultural elements of Blitar as the origin of pecel food, and the Malang City Icon, namely the lion, with simplification, stylization and deformation techniques. The cartoon-style mascot illustration design is easy to implement in various digital and print visual media. The design results are expected to strengthen the visual identity of Pecel Kane as a cultural heritage food, as well as being an example of the application of creative promotions for local MSMEs in Lowokwaru District.

1. Introduction

Branding is an essential aspect in strengthening the competitiveness of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Indonesia, especially amid an increasingly competitive market in the digital era. Efforts to enhance brand image and visual-based promotion have become relevant strategies for MSMEs to reach a wider audience. In line with this, the Tumbas Mbois Program was introduced as a collaborative initiative between the Lowokwaru District and Asia Institute of Malang, aiming to improve competitiveness and reinforce the branding of local MSMEs through mentoring and visual identity development.

One of the participants in this program is Pecel Kane, a culinary MSME focused on serving traditional Blitar-style pecel. This object of study was selected because it represents challenges commonly faced by MSME owners: while modern culinary trends such as Korean and Japanese food increasingly dominate the market, Pecel Kane continues to preserve local cultural values through its traditional flavors. This commitment creates

a unique appeal, yet it has not been supported by an effective visual strategy to communicate these cultural characteristics to its target audiences particularly students and adults in the Malang area.

In practice, Pecel Kane faces difficulties in presenting visual media that is consistent and representative of its brand identity. Its promotional materials remain conventional, lack distinctive visual characteristics, and have yet to effectively capture the attention of digital audiences. This situation results in limited visual differentiation and weak emotional connection between the brand and its consumers. Such conditions indicate the need for a creative approach that not only strengthens brand image but also communicates local cultural values in a more engaging and communicative manner.

This study was conducted to design promotional media in the form of a mascot representing the brand identity of Pecel Kane. A design thinking approach, guided by the 5W+1H method, was used to explore the brand's visual needs and character in depth. The mascot integrates the traditional values of Blitar-style pecel with an iconic symbol of Malang the lion, representing regional strength and pride. The result is a mixed-culture design concept that blends the richness of Blitar's traditions with the creative spirit of Malang. Thus, this research contributes to the development of culturally grounded visual branding strategies while supporting the goals of the Tumbas Mbois Program in enhancing the visual quality and competitiveness of MSMEs through sustainable design innovation.

1.1 Literature Review

A mascot is the personification of a brand in the form of a specific character with traits and distinctive features that represent the brand (Wheeler, Alina, 2009:46). A mascot functions as a visual character that embodies the identity of a brand or institution, aiming to build an emotional connection with its target audience.

Mascots play an important role in enhancing brand communication and engagement in digital media by offering creative flexibility, visual identity consistency, and emotional appeal elements that human models often cannot provide (Ardhianto, Aryani, & Utami, 2024:15). This indicates that mascots are not merely supporting visual elements, but rather communication strategies capable of strengthening a brand's character and image in a sustainable way.

Mascot characters have been proven to increase audience interaction on social media, reinforce brand identity through visual personification, and serve as narrative mediums that enable brands to convey values and messages more effectively (Putranto & Nirmala, 2022).

The use of mascots in digital communication not only strengthens a brand's visual identity but also serves as a creative medium for delivering promotional messages in a more dynamic manner. By personifying the institution's values, mascots can encourage audience engagement and enhance brand recall across various media platforms (Wibisono & Pratama, 2023:42).

2. Research Methods

This study employs a descriptive research method using a Design Thinking approach (Brown, 2008) along with the 5W+1H framework to analyze the strategies of Segmenting, Targeting, and Positioning (Hasan, 2014:330–395). This approach serves as the foundation for designing promotional media in the form of a mascot that is effective and relevant to Pecel Kane's target market.

According to Brown (2009), Design Thinking is an approach that bridges the gap between “knowing” and “doing” through user empathy, prototyping, and cross-disciplinary collaboration. As a result, the solutions produced are not only conceptual but also feasible to implement and impactful. This process consists of five main stages: Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype, and Test.

A. Empathize

The Empathize stage is the core of a human-centered design process, aiming to gain a deep understanding of user needs. Data collection was conducted through three techniques: Interviews were carried out with the owner of Pecel Kane as well as several members of the target audience, namely students and adults. The results

indicate that they recognize Pecel Kane as an affordable place to eat with an authentic Blitar-style pecel flavor. Consumers also perceive the atmosphere as simple yet comfortable, although several respondents expressed the need for more creative promotional efforts and more recognizable visual elements. Observation was conducted by directly visiting the business location and reviewing Pecel Kane's social media. The findings show that on-site promotional media are still conventional, such as simple banners and manual menu boards. On social media, the content consists of food photos but lacks visual consistency and distinguishing characteristics, and does not yet fully highlight Blitar's cultural values as a unique local identity. Meanwhile, the literature review emphasizes the importance of strengthening visual identity and branding through creative design. Relevant references include Hasan (2014), who discusses STP strategies as the basis for determining target markets and differentiation, and Wheeler (2017) in *Designing Brand Identity*, which highlights the importance of visual consistency, including the use of mascots as identity symbols. In addition, several journals related to mascot development were used to reinforce the design concept.

B. Define

The Define stage aims to synthesize the results of interviews, observations, and literature review to formulate an accurate problem statement. User needs analysis was conducted using the STP approach: Pecel Kane's market segmentation encompasses multiple aspects, beginning with demographics focused on consumers aged 17–25, and geographic segmentation targeting residents of Malang City. Behaviorally, the segment includes consumers seeking affordable food with a distinctive flavor, while psychographically it targets individuals who appreciate traditional cuisine, enjoy exploring new culinary experiences, and value local cultural identity. The targeting strategy used is user targeting, focusing on active consumers who seek inexpensive dining alternatives without sacrificing authentic taste. Based on this segmentation, Pecel Kane is positioned as an affordable Blitar-style pecel eatery strategically located in the Ketawanggede area of Malang.

C. Ideate

Ideate, according to Brown (2009), focuses on generating a variety of ideas creatively. The process begins with divergent thinking, which aims to produce numerous possible solutions, and continues with convergent thinking, which involves selecting and developing the best ideas. The objective is to arrive at a solution that balances human needs, technical feasibility, and business sustainability.

D. Prototype

Prototype, according to Brown (2009), is the stage of transforming ideas into simple models or prototypes, often created as scaled-down versions of the original product.

E. Test

Test, according to Brown (2009), is a rigorous evaluation stage in which the overall prototype is thoroughly examined. In this study, the testing was conducted using a Likert scale.

Based on these insights, the SWOT analysis of Pecel Kane can be detailed as follows:

Strengths: Pecel Kane offers authentic traditional Blitar-style pecel with consistent flavor and affordable pricing, making it appealing to both students and adults. Its location in Ketawanggede is strategic, and the business owner has experience and strong attention to quality. In addition, Pecel Kane has the potential to strengthen its visual identity through the development of a mascot that integrates local cultural values.

Weaknesses: Current promotional efforts remain conventional, social media content lacks consistency, and the visual identity is not yet strong nor reflective of local cultural elements. The dining facilities are simple and visually less appealing, and there is limited innovation in presenting digital content.

Opportunities: Pecel Kane has significant opportunities due to the growing interest among young consumers in authentic traditional cuisine. Creative promotions using mascots and digital media can help attract broader audience engagement. Government programs such as Tumbas Mbois also offer support for local MSMEs to strengthen their branding. Additionally, culinary experiences rooted in local culture are increasingly popular among students and urban communities.

Threats: Competition from modern restaurants and eateries, including Korean, Japanese, and fast-food establishments, presents a major challenge. Rapid shifts in consumer preferences driven by new trends, potential declines in purchasing power, and the emergence of local competitors adopting similar concepts also pose threats to business sustainability.

Ideate: according to Brown (2009), focuses on generating a wide range of ideas creatively. The process begins with divergent thinking, which aims to produce multiple possible solutions, followed by convergent thinking, which involves selecting and developing the best ideas. The goal is to find a solution that balances human needs, technical feasibility, and business sustainability.

Prototype, as described by Brown (2009), is the stage of transforming ideas into simple models or prototypes, often in a scaled-down form of the actual product. Test, according to Brown (2009), is a rigorous evaluation phase in which the overall prototype is tested. In this study, the testing process was carried out using a Likert scale

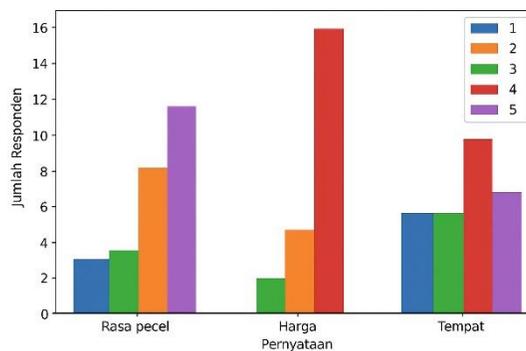


Fig. 1 Graphic Skala Likert

3. Result and Discussion

The process of designing the Pecel Kane mascot was carried out through several stages, beginning with the determination of the character concept, the development of forms, the selection of a color palette, and its application to promotional media. The mascot was conceptualized as a lion character combined with cultural elements of Blitar’s traditional pecel, representing the strength of local identity as well as the traditional culinary image of Pecel Kane. This approach aligns with the UMKM’s objective to present modern branding while remaining rooted in cultural values.

The initial stage involved creating various facial expressions and poses for the mascot, which were then evaluated to select the option most aligned with Pecel Kane’s character. The final design integrates visual attributes of the lion as the icon of Malang City and the Cakra Palah Batik motif from Blitar, resulting in a distinctive and easily recognizable appearance



Fig. 2 Final Mascot Design Front, Back and Side

The mascot was then developed into a series of visual assets, including various facial expressions, body details, and poses from the front, back, and side views. All of these assets were applied across digital and print media as part of Pecel Kane’s promotional strategy.

To evaluate the mascot’s effectiveness, a survey was conducted with 90 respondents using a Likert scale. The questionnaire consisted of nine items assessing visual appeal, brand representation, memorability, and the overall appropriateness of the mascot in relation to Pecel Kane’s brand identity.

Table 1 Mascot Effectiveness Survey

No	Question	SS	S	KS	TS
1	The Pecel Kane mascot catches my attention	33	40	10	7
2	The mascot represents Pecel Kane’s identity well.	25	45	15	5
3	I can easily remember Pecel Kane after seeing this mascot.	25	50	12	87
4	The mascot’s poses and expressions make it more appealing.	25	44	14	7
5	This mascot makes me interested in trying Pecel Kane’s products.	23	40	18	9
6	The mascot’s colors and design align with Pecel Kane’s brand image.	25	40	20	5
7	The mascot helps me recognize Pecel Kane on social media as well as in print.	27	42	16	5
8	The mascot increases my interest in Pecel Kane’s promotional activities.	22	38	20	10
9	Overall, the mascot is effective as a promotional medium for Pecel Kane.	27	45	15	3

Survey results indicate that approximately 82.3% of respondents agree that the Pecel Kane mascot is appropriate and suitable to be used as a business representation. Most respondents rated the mascot as visually appealing, reflective of Pecel Kane’s values, and effective in attracting attention in promotional activities. However, a small portion of respondents (below 10%) expressed neutral or less favorable opinions, indicating that there is still room for improvement in the mascot’s expression dynamics and memorability.

These results emphasize that a well-designed mascot can strengthen brand identity, enhance recognition, and support promotional efforts across various digital platforms. The use of mascot visual assets in multiple media increases audience engagement, aligning with the preferences of Pecel Kane’s target market. These findings support the view of Wheeler (2009:46), which states that a mascot, as the personality of a brand expressed through a specific character, can serve as a communication tool and a means of differentiation, effective in the short term for brand awareness and in the long term for loyalty.

In addition, the use of local elements, such as Blitar's culinary culture and the iconic identity of the city of Malang, provides a unique competitive advantage, distinguishing Pecel Kane from other similar businesses. This cultural approach creates a positive mixed culture with the audience and contributes to a stronger emotional connection with the brand.

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, the design of the Pecel Kane mascot using a design thinking approach has proven effective in strengthening visual identity and supporting the promotional strategy of the UMKM. The mascot, which combines the symbolic icon of Malang City with elements of Blitar's culinary culture, successfully attracts attention, enhances recall, and consistently represents the brand's values across various digital and print media. Survey results show that the majority of respondents consider the mascot appealing and relevant, while the use of local elements provides a competitive advantage and fosters a stronger emotional connection with the audience. Thus, the mascot not only functions as a creative promotional tool but also as a means to reinforce cultural identity and build a long-term relationship between Pecel Kane and its consumers.

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