

THE 77 YEARS (1941-2018) EVOLUTION OF MASTIKA'S COVER: A VISUAL FRAMING OF THE MALAY AUDIENCE'S INTERESTS

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Abstract: This article analyses how *Mastika* magazine, one of the oldest and most established lifestyle magazines in Malaysia, framed the Malay interest throughout its 77 years of publication. The study applies framing theory and design principles to examine how the magazine presented the interests of its Malay audiences through the designs of its covers. A visual analysis of 80 covers from 1941 to 2018 was performed, comparing several aspects concerning both the content of the magazine and the art design. Results showed that the evolution of *Mastika* can be explained through 6 time phases that captured a dynamic use of images and graphics to define and represent the interest of the Malay audiences.

Keywords: Magazine Covers, Visual Framing, Malay Audiences, Cover Designs, Culture

Introduction

Published by *Utusan Melayu* on June 1, 1941, *Mastika* holds the undisputed record for being one of the oldest and most popular magazine in Malaysia. First published in the Arabic script

as *Mustika*, the magazine changed its name to *Mastika* during the early post Second World War years. Sold at 50 cents a copy, all 76 pages of its first issue were filled with short stories, academic features and poems. *Mastika's* primary objective during those pre-war years was to help spread the nationalist fervour sweeping across the country and, in the process, contribute to the advancement of the Malay community. As time passes by and development swept in, changes become apparent in the tastes and interests of *Mastika's* Malay audiences. Furthermore, there was also the change in the demographic of its Malay audiences which saw a move from the elite intellectual Malay to the new Middle class Malay who saw magazines as an entertainment media (Mohamed & Azzman, 2018). Responding to these changes, *Mastika* has in many occasions transformed its content and overall look to satisfy the demands of its changing audiences and their preferences.

Throughout its 77 years of publication, the magazine has gone through different stages of evolution in terms of design and interpretation of the Malay interest. Due to immense pressure coming from the Internet and the digitization of media, *Mastika* magazine had announced in November 2018 that it will cease its printed publication and will take its time to consider its next course of action. Despite this change and supposed temporary hiatus, *Mastika* is still a significant media as its previous collection continues to offer contents that were interesting, unique and attractive to the Malay audiences. This has led some (Teh, 2018) (Jaafar, 2019) to see *Mastika's* existence as historical and even legendary as it has managed to overcome many challenges and captured the Malay ideals and interests through many historical milestones. *Mastika* has managed to find a balance between fulfilling the interests of its Malay audiences with the rapid and dynamic transformations of the magazine as a form of popular media. As such, to study how a magazine like *Mastika* manages to continuously frame and respond to the interests of its audience is an interesting phenomenon to study. By applying the conceptual framework of visual framing this study aims to analyze the evolution of the covers of *Mastika* and understand how visual imageries capture as well as frame the dynamic change in the Malay audiences' interest. The changes are informed by data collected via visual analysis.

Visual Framing of Magazine Covers

The power to shape and influence perceptions that comes with visual images has increased the importance placed on visuals as framing devices (Mohamed & Azzman, 2018). Framing in this sense refers to how strategic use of visual imageries is used for specific purposes. According to Rodriguez and Dimitrova (2011), framing study is the most appropriate for analyzing how the visual elements on magazine covers act as symbolic tools for representing ideals within a culture. It is the front cover of a magazine that attracts people's interest and curiosity to discover the meaning offered behind the cover lines and the captivating images. The appeal factor of a magazine cover increases readership and this had made the study on covers more appealing (Held, 2005). Therefore, examining the design elements and overall images on the covers of *Mastika* reveals not only what magazine designers believe visually entices the reader to pick up the magazine but also how the magazine frames is concerned.

In general, frame analysis is an organization of experiences that people process in their minds. Reese (2001) stated that frames mainly serve as a systematic tool that manages ideas. Readers learn about themselves and others within and outside their circle through frames. However, media frames alone cannot create positive and negative impressions on a reader (Reese, 2001), the effects of framing also depend on many other factors like cultures, traditions and values that influence the way in which the reader make sense what he or she sees and reads.

Images direct a reader's attention and assist the reader to understand more accurately about realities of a situation because it is effective in mitigating emotional responses from an audience (Lester, 2005). Today, the development of media technologies have increased the numbers and varied the forms of visual images present all around the world. Messages on mass media for example, must have equal balance of literal text with attractive and meaningful visuals. Thus visual artists and graphic designers must know that the most relevant elements of images are those that enhance or mitigate certain consequences (Messaris & Abraham, 2001). Thus readers are encouraged to pay closer attention to visuals as framing devices within the media and how this affects the way an audience interprets the messages.

Although research on framing tends to focus on texts and words, visualized interpretations of a story are equally powerful in telling a story or explaining a piece of news. Rodriguez and Dimitrova (2011) explained that actually visual framing is even more significant in understanding the ways media frame an event or issue to the public. Regardless of whether a message is textual or visual, all messages in the media have literal and symbolic components (Lester, 2005) that can affect the visual communication of images used in the media.

Mohamed and Faisal (2019) argued that the magazine cover is the strength of a magazine and becomes the initial communication to the intended customer regarding the content available in the magazine. Designing a magazine cover not only requires creativity, but also expertise in visual communication. What is presented on the cover can determine whether a passerby decides to buy the magazine. Held (2005) stated that the cover is a magazine's most important selling tool. Therefore, magazine publishers depend on a cover's self-promotion as a mean of gaining readership (Held, 2005). Thus, a magazine cover must be attractive, expressive, and representative in creating a sense of identity. There are many elements that help accentuate the cover image include graphics, editing, layout, lighting effects, text designs and an engaging caption. The cover's design should be distinguishable from other magazines so that it could attract the reader to look inside the pages, and represent the magazine's ideas and contents (Mohamed and Faisal, 2019).

In a study analyzing magazine cover framing, Kang and Heo (2013), contended that magazine covers function as "an independent, self-contained unit." They also argued that "both the visual and textual elements need to be taken into consideration" because written texts "anchor" meanings while visual aspects create an instant "appeal" (Kang & Heo, 2013 p. 5).

Cardoso (2010) argued that magazine front covers have multiple layers, each playing a strategic role in communicating to the public. He wrote that covers have "lines of visibility (images); of enunciation (the title), of strength (the main headline and image); and of fracture (separation mechanisms for multiple subjects)" (Cardoso, 2010, p. 578). The researcher called magazine covers a form of "contact with the outside" world by using "the said (text)" and the "unsaid (graphic)" (Cardoso, 2010, p. 578). Mohamed and Faisal (2019) argued that impressions responding to visual images are stronger than impressions based on reading or hearing information.

Cantrel Rosas-Moreno, Harp and Bachmann (2013) argued that "cover exposure is much higher," compared to inside images, because it affects the "happenstance passerby as well as the selected viewer." They continue "covers also communicate the magazine's philosophy and identity" (Cantrel Rosas-Moreno et al., 2013, p. 3). Based on front cover text and imagery, a magazine's front covers can communicate to the public what topics and values are of key importance to that business. Researchers also contended that "more people see

magazine covers than actually read inside news content; handlers carefully control the magazine cover design process, as the choice of who or what is featured on the cover is both editorial and a social indication of importance” (Cantrel Rosas-Moreno et al., 2013, p. 3).

The magazine focused on in this study, *Mastika*, is known for some of its distinct design choices that have dynamically evolved throughout the 77 years it was on publication. These choices were made to accommodate the change in its audiences’ tastes and preferences. Known for being a magazine that focuses on the Malay identity and interest (Adenan, 2002), *Mastika* has not only adapted its content, it has also notably transformed its feel and look especially in terms of its cover designs to simultaneously respond and frame the changing Malay interest. To capture these changes through *Mastika*’s cover design, this study asks:

RQ1: How have the covers of *Mastika* evolved in the past 77 years?

RQ2: How does *Mastika* respond and frame its Malay audiences’ interest in the past 77 years?

Methodology

This research studied how *Mastika* visually framed symbols of Malay interest on its front covers and how these symbols have evolved together with the changes of its cover designs. This study examined a series of *Mastika* covers through a qualitative analysis. Through a visual analysis, the covers framing of the Malay audience were analyzed through the different uses of design elements. These elements include the person depicted on the cover, the image as a whole, and the overall way in which the symbol was portrayed.

Visual Framing on Mastika Covers

Mastika is a Malaysian magazine specifically targeted at the Malay audiences. Since its first publication in June 1941 to its last edition in November 2018, *Mastika* has always focused on the issues and lifestyle of the Malay demographic. The Malays are considered the natives in Malaysia. They are the majority ethnic group that has been in control of Malaysia’s sociopolitical structures. Historically, the Malays were the ones leading the people’s uprising against the colonials in the first and second world wars. Early Malay nationalism reached its peak in the early 1940s when many newly educated Malays started building the nationalist discourse through available media such as books, newspapers and magazines. In these early years, many nationalist magazines were produced such as *Cahaya Bintang* and *Majalah Cherita* and *Bintang Malaya* (Adnan, 2002). These magazines were mostly read by a selected group of educated and literate Malays who will then pass the nationalist message to the wider audiences. *Mastika* was among these early patriotic magazines that focused on the Malay ideals. Even after Malaysia (then Malaya) achieved its independence, *Mastika* continued its Malay nationalist agenda. Its early editors such as Keris Mas and A. Samad Ismail were very much driven by the need to guide the Malays into having their own identity that is independent from any colonial and imperialist agenda. However this more political and nationalistic tone soon changed together with the modern development of the Malay people. *Mastika* changed its approach several times to respond to the demands of times. What remains consistent is *Mastika*’s dependence on its Malay audience. Therefore, to capture this relationship between *Mastika*’s covers and its framing of the Malay interest, a qualitative analysis was used.

Research Design

Since magazine covers are this study’s main unit of analysis, it is important to apply a qualitative approach in evaluating the ways in which the ideas and symbols that represent

Malay cultures were visually presented. The coding units include images, texts, styles and design elements. In the main observational analysis, the complete cover image was first analyzed. The visual details of each of the covers were then studied, including the use of colors, the cover title, the design elements, textual styles and the figure featured on the cover. This is then followed by a combination of observation, historical and textual analysis that will appropriate the effects of how the images frame the stories that interest the Malay audiences. Looking at the covers from a design perspective emphasized *Mastika*'s particular stylistic choices and provided insight into the visual meaning of the Malay interest. In addition, the contents that accompanied each cover were read for context in order to gain a better understanding of the meaning behind the cover image and the person or object depicted.

Research Findings

The research findings found that the evolution of *Mastika* magazine covers and its representation of the Malay interest can be chronologically grouped into the 5 phases. These phases were aptly categorized based on the cover designs captured the essence of the Malay audiences. The 77 years of cover designs could be thematically identified into: The Fighting Malays (1941-1947), The Liberated Malays (1948-1967), The Modern Malays (1968-1995), The Contemporary Malays (1996-2006) and lastly, The Millennial Malays (2007-2018). In each of these phases, the magazine covers applied distinct design elements that were attributed by the time in which they were published. Each phase was unique in the sense that the cover designs followed specific trends that were different from the other phases. Each phase also represented the kind of images and ideals that identified the Malay interest. To better articulate the findings, each phase will be explained through the two main contexts problematized in the two research questions which are: design evolution (RQ1) and framing of Malay interest (RQ2). Design evolution discusses the visual characteristics of the magazine covers while the framing of Malay interest qualitatively assesses how the images on the covers conceptualize the ideas of the Malay audiences.

Phase 1: The Fighting Malays (1941-1947)

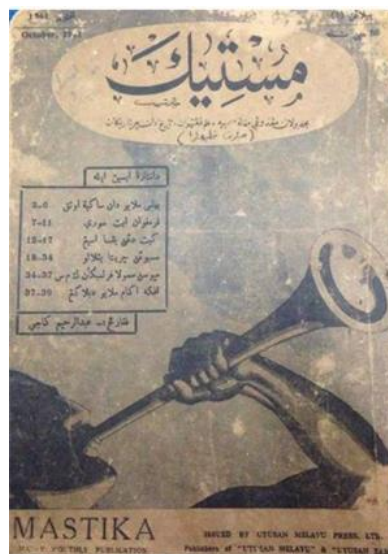


Diagram 1: Mastika's First Cover On June 1st, 1941 Featuring A Man Blowing A Horn

Design Evolution

In the early years of its publication, the designs of *Mastika* covers were very traditional as it mainly used hand-drawn illustrations. Even the scripts used was the Arabic script. The covers appeared dark and blunt due to the limited use of publication and graphic technologies at the time. Traditional stamp printing obviously limited the ability to create a sharper and more sophisticated designs. In fact, *Mastika* maintained the same cover for both its 1941 and 1942 editions. According to Sannusi (2014), during these early years, *Mastika* functioned more like a newspaper rather than a magazine. This is not only due to the limited images it used, it was also because the content were very much focused on reporting about political issues that affected the Malays at the time. The magazine was so traditional that it even placed the page index or table of contents on its front covers. However, this is relatable as magazines during this time were less commercial and more political. They were mainly read by the Malay elites who were driven by the nationalist wave that was building at the time. Images placed on the covers were not meant to attract the audience but were to represent the ideas it wants to propagate. For example, on its first edition, an image of a man blowing a horn was made the cover. This image is symbolic as it was really a call for the Malay people to rise up and fight for their independence from the British colonials. However this approach to design changed in 1945 when *mastika* resumed its publication after the world war. In response to the change Malay interest, the covers of *Mastika* started to feature more attractive images especially those of beautiful and attractive women. *Mastika*'s circulation increased from 6000 copies to 12,000 copies during this transition (Zakaria, 2006).

Framing of the Malay Audience

In its first two years of publication, *Mastika* was exclusively focused on the nationalist agenda. It was focused on motivating the elite Malay literate to fight for independence. It was also building a new breed of the 'Fighting Malays' who needed to be liberated from their colonized mind into nationalists that were demanding for sovereignty and independence. However, the publication of all types of magazines came to a standstill during the Second World War. Apart from the acute shortage and high cost of printing materials, publishers and authors alike found it stifling to adhere to the strict requirements and censorship rules of the Japanese Propaganda Department, the Gun Senden Han. Printing machines throughout the country fell silent as many preferred to stay on the side lines rather than risk the ire of the Kampetai, the feared Japanese secret police (Teh, 2018).

The end of the war in August 1945 and the subsequent return of the British saw resurgence in the Malay magazine industry. *Mastika* resumed publication on Nov 1, 1946 with a whole new look. Shifting its focus slightly away from politics, the magazine adopted a more literary stance to appeal to a wider audience. While short stories and literary writings dominated its pages, the magazine also ran articles related to humour, human interest as well as those on social and historical issues. There is a significance to this change. For one, the Malays were already very much exhausted by the repercussion of the war and the Japanese occupation. They needed time to heal and stabilize. *Mastika* responded to this by offering its Malay audiences an escape by also sharing lifestyle stories that were not too serious. However at the same time, it never truly left its nationalist root. Instead ideas of freedom and liberation still dominate the magazine albeit in a more casual note.

As the magazine continued to progress and build readerships, its editorial team grew as well. During its early years, *Mastika*'s contents were mostly written by a small number of journalists but this slowly changed and *Mastika*'s content started to include articles written by

the editorial staff in Singapore as well as contributing authors from the rest of Malaya. Due to its diversified content and increased circulation, the magazine changed its introductory line from 'Malay Monthly Publication' in 1946 to 'Leading Malay Monthly Publication' after just two brief years (Teh, 2018).

Phase 2: The Liberated Malays (1948-1967)

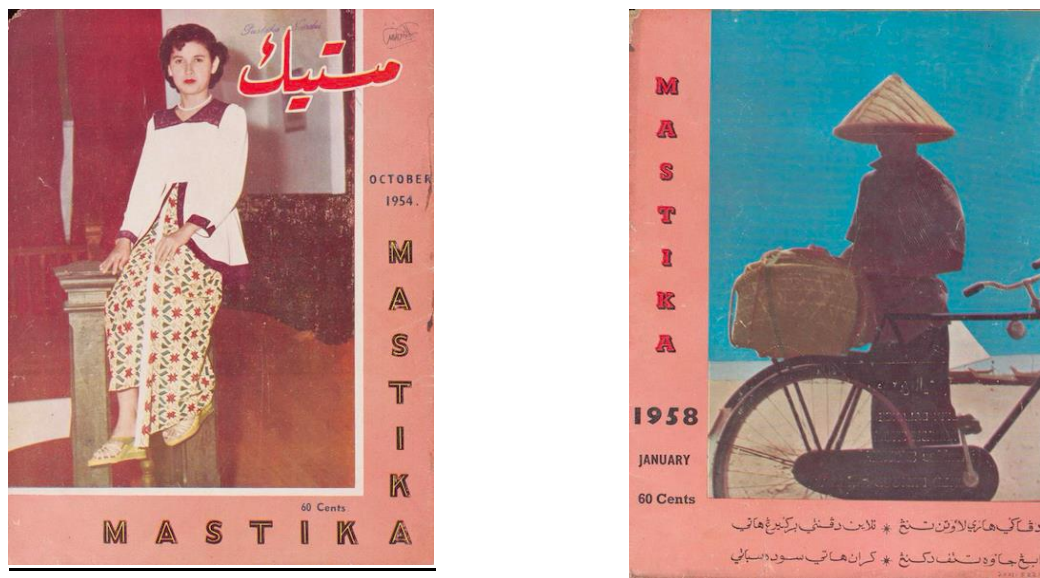


Diagram 2: Mastika's Covers In The 1950s

Design Evolution

Mastika's rise in 1946 was shortlived. By 1948, *Mastika* was nearly forced to shutter due to a drastic drop in circulation and massive losses. The situation was so bad that contributing authors were given free copies of the magazine in lieu of payment (Teh, 2018; Jaafar, 2019). Keris Mas took over the editorship at that critical juncture and was given the unenviable task of turning around the magazine's fortune. Keris Mas immediately set about making drastic and unpopular changes. He revamped the overall magazine concept, retaining only interesting romance and detective short stories. The magazine covers were equally overhauled. *Mastika* started featuring local or internationally acclaimed actresses on its cover in full color. Photographs of famous film stars and interesting scenes from popular movies became the main images. The magazine title and masthead started to include Romanized letters. Index of content was no longer placed in front. This indicated the transition in the design principles used by the publication. It was moving towards a modern, western-inspired commercialization of magazine covers. This well explained the change in the Malay audiences who at the time was becoming more interested in entertainment, lifestyle and modernity.

Framing of The Malay Audience

By 1949, *Mastika* was on a much better footing. To improve its circulation, the magazine's editorial board decided to introduce an entertainment section that provided coverage on the rapidly growing Malay movie industry. At this juncture, the readers of *Mastika* was no longer confined to the elite Malay nationalists. It has started to include a wider range of Malay audience. This may be due to the increased literacy among the Malay people who were getting more educational opportunity with many moving up to tertiary education. Realizing

this potential, *Mastika* started to open its magazine to reader submission. *Mastika* even offered honorarium as an incentive to its best short story and essay authors. This additional form of payment began in January 1951 and was warmly welcomed by the magazine's committed contributors. In March 1952, *Mastika* began organising short story writing contests to help identify budding writers among its pool of readers. This very much showed the change in the Malay audience. They were no longer the passive readers but are now celebrated as contributing writers. *Mastika* framed the idea of the 'liberated Malays' by focusing on issues and stories that were more relevant to the lives of the everyday Malays who saw liberation not only in terms of nationalist politics but also through the mundane abilities of appreciating modern cultures and enjoying films and fictional stories.

However, interest in short stories began to wane in 1953 and this was immediately noticed by the *Mastika* management. Changes were made to counter this change and a new editor was appointed. When Keris Mas left *Mastika* to join *Melayu Raya*, a rival to *Mastika*, Asraf Abdul Wahab was given the responsibility to ensure *Mastika*'s popularity was retained. As the new editor, Asraf was determined to not only increase *Mastika*'s readership, he was also very much concerned about the development of Malay intellect and culture. By 1954, he had reduced the number of short stories and increased articles on language, literature and culture, a translation of a foreign short story and poetries. Once again, the changes paid off handsomely and *Mastika*'s circulation began to climb.



Diagram 3: Mastika's Cover In The Early 1960s

Mastika continued its presence as a respected literary magazine in the years leading into Independence. To maintain standards, *Mastika* editors became more selective and features from contributing authors that made the cut were meticulously edited to ensure that they remained relevant to the Malay society during that time. The primary aims were to push the limits of Malay literary development and continue its relentless pursuit towards the advancement the Malay mind. In 1958, Utusan Melayu Press moved its office to Kuala Lumpur and, as a subsidiary, *Mastika* followed suit. As editor at that time, Usman Awang steered *Mastika* to greater heights by remaining loyal to the magazine's literary orientation that had entertained and educated the then liberated Malay audience.

Phase 3: The Modern Malays (1967 -1995)



Diagram 4: Mastika's cover in the early 1970s

Design Evolution

In February 1967, *Mastika* was printed in Romanised Malay for the first time in its history. This change was a milestone as it symbolizes the development of the Malay people. No longer were the Malays conversing using the traditional Arabic script. They have now become part of the developed world where the Roman script has been universally accepted as the common written text. The color reterization improved and this enabled for a more colorful and attractive cover. The cover design became sharper with less reliance on manual illustrations and more focused on high-end photography. By the 1980s, computer generated graphics started to be used. The magazine also took on a more serious approach when its front cover started featuring political events and leaders instead of attractive ladies. The magazine also started to include by-line on its covers. More page space is given to the masthead as the word 'Mastika' started to be written in bowl and is the main highlight of the cover.

Framing of the Malay Audience

In every significant phase, *Mastika* experienced a serious drop in readership but has always found its way back to the interest of the Malay audience. By the 1970s, the magazine experienced significant changes when it shifted focus from literature to education. Articles on general knowledge, stories of successful Malays and exam tips were the main content offered. This was marked by the changing nature of the Malay demographics. Political and economic development had given rise to a new middle-class Malays who were very serious about their socioeconomic interests (Mohamed, 2018). More young Malays were entering universities and the Malay psyche had changed wherein there was a realization that social mobility was very much dependent on educational achievements. The idea of the modern Malay was very much related to education and income levels and these were the issues discussed in *Mastika*.

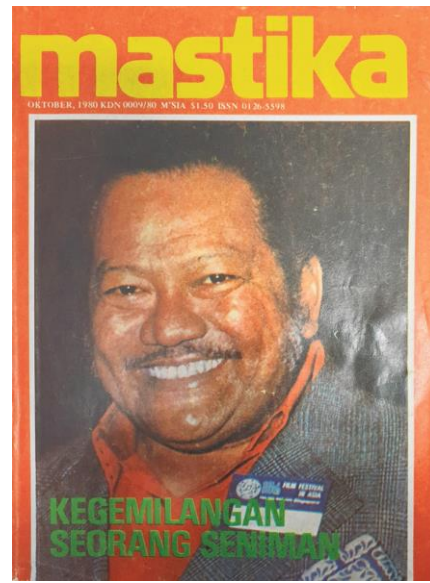


Diagram 5: Mastika's Cover In The Early 1980s

Things, however, didn't turn out as expected when the academic features that took centre stage slowly become unpopular in the late 1980s. When sales volume plummeted to just 6,000 copies in mid-1995, Utusan Melayu Press Group Editor-in-Chief Johan Jaaffar announced that the August 1995 edition will be *Mastika*'s last. However, many in the journalistic and literary world were opposed to this announcement and proposed that the magazine be given a second chance. Zainol Fakir was called to save the magazine and what the changes he brought to *Mastika* remains as one of the most legendary editorial decisions ever made in the journalistic history of Malaysia (Zakaria, 2006).

Phase 4: The Contemporary Malays (1996-2006)

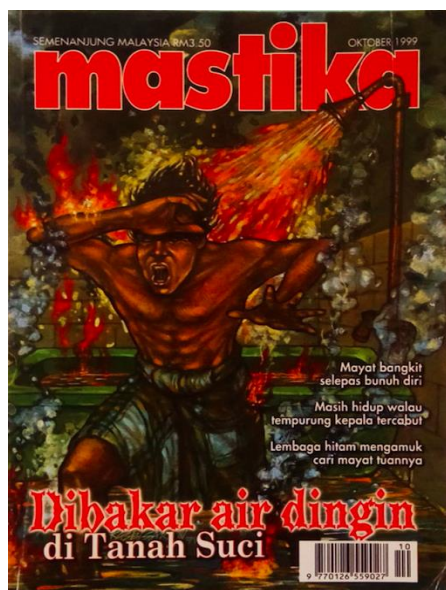


Diagram 6: Mastika's Cover In The Late 1990s

Design Evolution

The September 1995 issue was *Mastika*'s miracle turnaround. In the face of possible termination, *Mastika* offered a drastic change in its look and content. First, it reduced its size into a compact 7.4" X 5" digest resembling the then popular *Reader's Digest*, and went back to manual illustrations. However, the availability of better graphic and publication technologies, these illustrations were much sharper and attractive. The magazine also used dark colors, mostly black and red to create a unique feel of magic and mysticism that became the main stories in its content. The headlines for the cover and inside stories were also written in a sensationalized manner. While this change is a far cry from the ideas of the modern and educated Malay, it was nevertheless a respond to the demands of the Malay audience who apparently were more interested in fantasy and escapism.

Framing the Malay Audience

By September 1995, *Mastika*'s circulation doubled instantly from 6000 to 12 000 copies (Zakaria, 2006). It became obvious that the Malay audience were no longer interested with intellectual and literary content. Instead they prefer lifestyle stories that were light an entertaining. The October 1996 issue proved this and further changed *Mastika*'s direction when it offered unique feature on 'cerita mayat' or 'stories of the dead'. In that edition, *Mastika* published a main story on a corpse that had suddenly vomited bugs and excrement. It was a story that was often considered sacred by the Malays and *Mastika* shared it as a piece of entertainment article. The article proved to satisfy the Malay interest as the October 1996 issue went sold out fast. Realizing that they had hit the jackpot, the editorial continued with stories of mysteries, magic, mysticism and witchcraft in its November issues and the many issues after that. Stories of tragedies, unique circumstances and weird happenings from all around the world added to *Mastika*'s content. In a short time, *Mastika* returned as the number one magazine in Malaysian with an average monthly circulation of 200,000.



Diagram 7: Mastika's Cover In The Mid-2000s

While this change from educational to mystical content would make it easy to reduce the Malay audience as becoming less patriotic and intellectual; the context of time, the demands of modern life and the change in socioeconomic status must be considered as the main contributors to this change. The Malays of the new millennium were very much educated and

modern. Much like citizens of the developed and developing countries, the Malays saw the media mainly for its entertainment value. The stress of modern life had given rise to the middle class who was not looking to be preached at but to be relieved from the demands of their busy every day. In other words, the Malays were becoming contemporary. They were simply responding to change of modern life. This not only changed *Mastika* but all modern media. The rise of globalization and commercialization made it almost compulsory for the media focus on its entertainment value.



Diagram 8: Mastika's Cover In The Mid-2000s

Phase 5: The Millennial Malays (2007-2018)

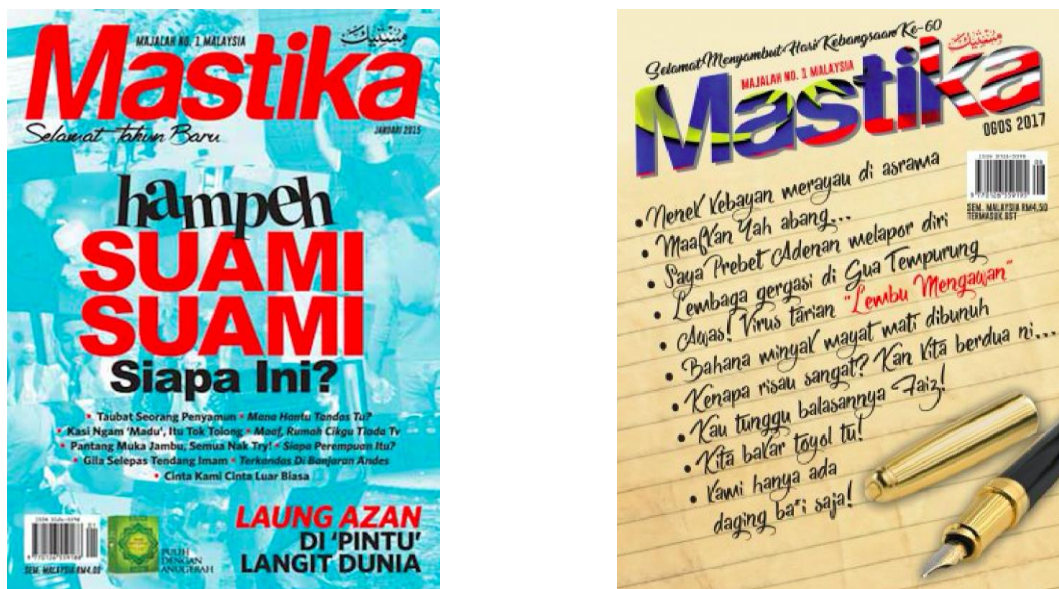


Diagram 9: Mastika's Cover In The Mid-2000s

Design Evolution

By the end of the second decade of the new millennium, *Mastika* magazine have completely adopted the modern design principle. The magazine started to incorporate a more 'remixed'

approach towards its cover designs. Remix design allows and encourages derivative works by combining or editing existing materials to produce a new creative work or product. It defines the type of creative content we see in digital spaces today. Remix design is the epitome of postmodernism where modern technologies facilitate the mixing and mashing of different media content with philosophical ideals. This change towards remix became more evident in *Mastika's* covers in the last years of its printed publication. There was complexity in the designs that used many techniques, such as shadowing, photo filled text, transparent, color mashing and many others. The images on the covers are also varied where elements of graphics were combined with illustrations, photography and texts. *Mastika* also adopted 3D designs to create an illusion of realness in their cover images. This adoption of more sophisticated design techniques was required as the magazine was dealing with a more media savvy audience, the millennial Malays who are exposed to all kinds of media and design techniques.

Framing of The Malay Audience

In its last decade of publication, *Mastika* continued to focus on lifestyle stories. Occasionally adding mystical stories that made it popular in the early 2000s. Yet, it was finding it hard to fulfill the demands of its millennial audience. The Millennial Malays whose media habits are very much different from their predecessors proved to be hard to satisfy. No lifestyle or mystical stories can be too unique for these millennials as they are exposed to unprecedented amount of media content and options (Wok & Mohamed, 2017). Although *Mastika* did try to adopt a more casual approach in its stories, writing and designs' in line with the less structured lifestyle of the young Malays, it succumbed to the slow death of the printed magazine that also affected the global printed media industries. In November 2018, it announced that it was to cease publication. And unlike the same threats that occurred in 1946 and 1995, this time there was no surprise turnaround. It was indeed *Mastika's* final goodbye. One that is historical, considering the 77 years it has endured to maintain relevant to the Malay audience. Despite its closure, *Mastika* remains the longest running magazine in Malaysia. It could as well be the most legendary.



Diagram 10: Mastika's last cover in November 2018

Discussion and Conclusion

Cantrel Rosas-Moreno et al. (2013) argued that front covers convey the identity of a publication. Magazine covers have an extensive reach that communicates to a broad audience, both on newsstands and the Internet. This reach is arguably greater than the content of the magazine, as one must purchase a magazine, or a subscription, to receive said content. The function of a magazine cover is to capture attention and to communicate about the inside content. This study examines how *Mastika* covers convey the publication's identity.

This article analyzes how magazine covers frame the interest of the Malay audience by studying the evolution of the covers of Malaysia's *Mastika* magazine. Through two research questions that asked about the evolution of *Mastika*'s covers and its subsequent framing the Malay audience, the study found that *Mastika* magazine has dynamically evolved in terms of visual design and has been liberal in its framing of the Malays. In the 77 year of its printed publication, the magazine covers had gone through 4 phases of changes. These changes were captured into five categories: The Fighting Malays (1941-1947), The Liberated Malays (1948-1967), The Modern Malays (1968-1995), The Contemporary Malays (1996-2006) and lastly, The Millennial Malays (2007-2018). In each phase, the magazine had adopted unique design strategies that were very much influenced by the development of graphic and publication technologies. These changes in design elements and visual images on the magazine's covers also documented the magazine's influence on its targeted readers: the Malay audience. *Mastika* magazine proved to be a dynamic magazine as it was always evolving to remain relevant. Through its contents and visual imageries, it has framed the historical growth of its Malay audience. Instead of seeing the Malays as a monolithic and mundane demographic group, it captures and promotes evolving ideas of the Malay people. Hence it does not frame the Malays into a constrained definition, instead it presented a multifaceted changes of the Malay audiences who had evolved across time. This is evidenced by the different interests framed by the magazine that included politics, literature, entertainment and even mysticism.

Thus, this article found significant evidence for the arguments that visuals can be framing devices on magazine covers. Through the media like *Mastika*, the Malay audiences learn about the world they live in and how other peoples' experiences make them consider about issues relation to their own identity, including how they adapt within their own cultures and traditions. The results confirmed that magazine covers are more than just marketing tools, they are also powerful forms of cultural expressions that depict the way people view the world and themselves.

This study was mainly challenged by the difficulty of gathering the magazine covers. It was almost impossible to gather all the magazine covers, as even the national library did not have the whole archive. Access to all of the publications would have definitely enriched that study. At the same time, a more in-depth look into the impact of *Mastika* on the Malay people and its interests would require a larger and intensive content analysis of not only the visual imageries but also the news, stories and ideas written and shared by the magazine throughout its existence. Unfortunately this study lacks the methodological as well as the funding capacity to do so. Therefore, it is suggested for future studies to incorporate content analysis in the attempt to better understand the impact of magazines on cultures and societies.

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