



Designing the Visual Identity of Malay Cultural Arts Based on Generation Z Visual Preferences: A Design Thinking Approach

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Abstract

The visual identity of Malay cultural arts faces a pressing relevance challenge in the digital era, particularly among Generation Z who have grown up with modern, minimalist, and fast visual preferences. This study aims to map the visual preferences of Generation Z toward Malay cultural arts and, based on those preferences, to formulate a conceptual framework for designing an adaptive Malay visual identity through a Design Thinking approach. The authors employed a descriptive quantitative survey, administered online to 51 respondents aged 17 to 27 years, complemented by thematic analysis of open-ended answers. The survey instrument was structured following the first three stages of Design Thinking, namely empathize, define, and ideate, hereafter called the diagnostic stages. Instrument reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, and the overall scale of 20 items reached $\alpha = 0.838$, which is considered good for an exploratory descriptive study. The results show that Generation Z perceives the current visual representation of Malay culture as conventional and dated, with 70.6% rating it as either conventional or behind the times. The digital engagement disposition recorded the highest construct mean ($M = 4.02$ on a 5-point scale), and the statement that respondents grasp cultural values more easily through creative visuals than through long text reached the highest single mean ($M = 4.29$). In other words, Generation Z is willing to engage with Malay culture, provided that it is delivered in a visual and short-format manner. However, the preference for neutral colors recorded the lowest mean ($M = 3.41$), and the qualitative data confirmed that respondents want the Malay color palette and motifs to be retained rather than removed. Thus, the authors propose the Hybrid Malay Visual Identity Framework, hereafter called HMVIF, which integrates three dimensions: the cultural dimension, the contemporary aesthetic dimension, and the digital communication dimension. This framework is expected to serve as a practical reference for designing a Malay cultural visual identity that is modern, communicative, and rooted in local values, especially in the Riau Archipelago.

Keywords: malay culture, visual identity, design thinking, generation z, visual communication design

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1. Introduction

Globalization and digital technology have fundamentally changed the way the younger generation interacts with local arts and culture. Generation Z, that is the cohort born between 1997 and 2012, grows up as digital natives within a dynamic visual environment that is dominated by global popular culture [1]. This condition has implications for the declining interest of the younger generation in local culture, which is still largely delivered through conventional approaches that are not aligned with their visual preferences [2], [3]. In the context of visual communication design, this gap is not merely a matter of taste, but a matter of cultural communication,

because visual identity is the system through which a culture introduces and sustains itself across generations.

Malay culture is one of the great cultural heritages of the Nusantara, and it possesses a strong wealth of values, symbols, and visual identity. This wealth is reflected through ornamental motifs, wood-carving art, the Jawi script, traditional architecture, and a color system that is rich in philosophical and religious meaning [4], [5]. In the Riau Archipelago, Malay culture functions as the foundation of the regional identity, and it is closely tied to Islamic values that shape the visual character of its society [5], [6]. However, amid the current of modernization, the visual representation of Malay culture is frequently perceived

as something old, static, and less relevant for the digital generation [7]. Thus, the visual richness of Malay culture has not been optimally translated into a form that is communicative for Generation Z.

Several studies have shown that cultural visualization which is packaged according to the character of the media and the visual style of the younger generation is proven to be more effective in building cultural awareness and appreciation [8], [9]. Visual identity does not function only as an aesthetic element, but as a communication system that represents the values, meaning, and character of a culture in a consistent manner to its audience [10], [11]. In other words, the success of cultural preservation in the digital era is determined not only by the content of the cultural values, but also by the way those values are visually presented.

Research on Malay visual identity has been carried out by a number of scholars, among them Ahmad et al. [4] who examined the carving motifs of traditional Malay houses, and Muhamad et al. [7] who studied the visual representation of Malaysian cultural identity in printmaking artworks. On the other hand, studies on the visual preferences of Generation Z by Wibowo and Zainudin [14], Belliza and Kusumawati [15], and Cheng and Chen [16] have provided a more comprehensive understanding of the aesthetic characteristics of this generation. Nevertheless, studies that systematically integrate traditional Malay visual elements with the actual, measured preferences of Generation Z, especially within the context of the Riau Archipelago, are still very limited. This gap becomes the main focus of the present study.

Based on the description above, this study is directed to answer the following questions, that is: (1) how does Generation Z perceive the current visual representation of Malay cultural arts; (2) what are the visual preferences of Generation Z that are relevant for the design of a Malay visual identity; and (3) how can traditional Malay visual elements be integrated with those preferences into a conceptual framework. Accordingly, the objectives of this study are to map the visual preferences of Generation Z toward Malay cultural arts, and to formulate the Hybrid Malay Visual Identity Framework as a practical reference for designers, cultural institutions, and the regional government of the Riau Archipelago.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Visual Identity and Cultural Preservation in the Digital Era

A visual identity is a consistent visual system that represents an entity's values, character, and meaning to its audience. Within cultural contexts, it serves to transmit cultural values across generations [9], [10]. Furthermore, design can capture and reflect key local cultural features in an accessible visual format, thereby

playing an important role in cultural preservation amid globalization [12].

This preservation mechanism is evident in semiotic research on Padang Ampera restaurants across Java, which demonstrates that consistent "visual anchors"—such as specific color codes, characteristic rooflines, and display conventions—effectively maintain cultural identity within an urban diaspora [13]. This finding is highly relevant to the present study as it proves that a cultural visual identity remains legible and meaningful when its core anchors are deliberately preserved, even as the broader visual language undergoes modernization.

Complementing this approach, empirical evidence shows that integrating local cultural values into a visual identity system designed systematically through Design Thinking yields an authentic and communicative brand image [24]. This precedent provides a practical foundation for developing a Malay cultural visual identity, reinforcing that a region's visual identity is a dynamic fusion of cultural heritage and contemporary development [11].

2.2 Visual Preferences of Generation Z

Generation Z possesses distinctive visual-preference characteristics. Empirical evidence indicates that this demographic in Indonesia tends to favor minimalist design characterized by the effective use of white space, simple typography, and a neutral color palette [14]. Concurrently, attractive color combinations and unique typography have been shown to increase a product's perceived quality within this age group [15]. Research also reveals a strong attachment to visual elements that incorporate novelty and biophilic values; specifically, a psychological pathway moving from novelty to admiration, and ultimately to place attachment, serves as the primary mechanism for their emotional engagement with cultural heritage [16]. Furthermore, studies show a distinct preference for modernist and visually stimulating styles [17]. Thus, while the literature consistently points to a preference for a clean, modern aesthetic, the present study demonstrates that this tendency is not absolute when local cultural identity is involved.

2.3 Malay Visual Elements and Their Potential

Traditional Malay house carving motifs carry deep philosophical, religious, and social values, functioning not merely as aesthetic ornaments but as primary mediums for conveying cultural identity [4]. This capacity for integration is also evident in contemporary art, where traditional cultural values are successfully embedded into modern visual works without sacrificing their cultural authenticity [6]. To operationalize this preservation in design, three primary strategies are highly relevant: Historical

Revival, Eclectic Historicism, and Free Historicism [20]. Each of these approaches can be systematically integrated within the ideate stage of a Design Thinking framework to ensure cultural continuity.

2.4 Design Thinking in Culture-Based Visual Design

Design Thinking is a human-centered problem-solving approach widely applied within visual communication design [18], [19]. Its integration into design pedagogy significantly enhances the ability to identify, analyze, and resolve complex design problems [18], while the methodology itself enables designers to deconstruct workflows and articulate design concepts logically and systematically [19]. In cultural preservation, collaborative design approaches demonstrate that visual communication plays a vital role in shaping identity and facilitating community dialogue through visual storytelling [9]. Furthermore, contemporary graphic design trends can effectively reinterpret cultural heritage without sacrificing its essence [21], and leveraging authentic local identities—including cultural symbols and narratives—substantially increases product value [22].

In multi-ethnic contexts, however, design challenges become increasingly complex. Analysis of multicultural public interfaces reveals significant difficulties in developing culturally sensitive visual systems for diverse societies, where a lack of inclusive guidelines often results in visual choices that overrepresent one cultural group at the expense of others [23]. Although dominated by Malay culture, the Riau Archipelago is inherently multicultural. Therefore, the development of a regional Malay visual identity must ensure that its visual language communicates distinct cultural characteristics without erasing the broader plurality of its residents. This consideration directly informs the framing of the HMVIF as a flexible, dimensional model rather than a rigid visual template.

3. Methods

This study employed a descriptive quantitative research design with a cross-sectional survey approach, complemented by a thematic analysis of open-ended responses. Positioned as preliminary research, this study maps the phenomenon and establishes an empirical foundation prior to visual prototype development. The research process was framed using the first three stages of Design Thinking—empathize, define, and ideate—utilized here as an analytical structure for the diagnostic and conceptual phase rather than a full design-production cycle.

Within this framework, the empathize stage involved collecting data on the characteristics, perceptions, and visual preferences of Generation Z toward Malay cultural arts. In the define stage, these data were analyzed to specify the core design problem and research gap. Finally, the ideate stage mapped these

findings against traditional Malay visual elements to formulate the conceptual framework. The subsequent prototype and test stages remain beyond the scope of this article and are planned for future research.

3.1 Respondents and Sampling

The target population for this study comprised Generation Z individuals within the Riau Archipelago. Respondents were selected via purposive sampling based on two inclusion criteria: an age range of 17 to 27 years and voluntary participation. A total of 51 respondents completed the survey instrument. Regarding sample-size adequacy in preliminary and exploratory research, a sample of 30 to 40 participants is considered sufficient for descriptive aims, including the estimation of instrument internal consistency and the identification of broad patterns to inform subsequent full-scale studies [25]. The current sample of 51 exceeds this baseline, confirming its adequacy for the descriptive and exploratory objectives of this study. Demographically, the majority of respondents were domiciled in the Riau Archipelago—primarily in Batam and Tanjung Pinang—with a small percentage located outside the region. The high concentration of respondents with an art and design background is recognized as a specific sample characteristic and is addressed further in the limitations section.

3.2 Survey Instrument

The instrument was developed as an online questionnaire structured into five parts. Part one collected demographic profiles, including age, gender, domicile, educational background, and digital media usage. Part two assessed levels of recognition and exposure to Malay culture. Part three measured visual preferences across 20 statements using a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 for strongly disagree to 5 for strongly agree), organized around four primary constructs: contemporary aesthetics, cultural value disposition, Malay element adaptation, and digital engagement. Part four evaluated preferences for specific visual concepts. Finally, part five comprised open-ended questions investigating the factors behind low cultural appeal, characteristics of an ideal visual identity, and the most effective platforms for communication.

3.3 Instrument Reliability

Here are two ways to refine and simplify this statistical reliability section in English, maintaining strict academic precision while shifting to a completely objective, author-free narrative. Option 1: Academic & Cohesive (Recommended for Smooth Flow) To assess the internal consistency of the instrument, Cronbach's alpha was calculated for the overall scale and each of its four constructs. The overall 20-item scale

demonstrated strong reliability ($\alpha = 0.838$), confirming its adequacy for the descriptive objectives of this study. At the construct level, acceptable reliability was achieved for Contemporary Aesthetics ($\alpha = 0.741$), Malay Element Adaptation ($\alpha = 0.732$), and Digital Engagement ($\alpha = 0.783$). Conversely, the Cultural Value Disposition construct yielded an alpha of $\alpha = 0.598$, falling below the conventional 0.70 threshold. This lower value likely reflects the conceptual breadth of the four items within the construct—authenticity, narrative interest, uniqueness, and the modern-traditional blend—which capture distinct facets of cultural disposition rather than a single, highly uniform latent factor. This finding is reported transparently as a methodological note, and refining this specific construct is identified as an objective for future instrument development. Item-level results are detailed in Section 4.3.

3.1 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions, percentages, means, and standard deviations, alongside the aforementioned reliability analysis. Concurrently, open-ended responses underwent thematic categorization, where recurring keywords were grouped into conceptual themes. All data were processed using a spreadsheet application and are reported in tabular form.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1 Respondent Demographic Profile

A total of 51 respondents participated in this study. As detailed in Table 1, the sample was dominated by individuals aged 20 to 22 years (45.1%), followed equally by the 17–19 and 26–27 age cohorts (19.6% each). Geographically, the majority were located in Batam (72.5%)—the largest urban center in the Riau Archipelago—while Tanjung Pinang and other areas within the archipelago accounted for 9.8%, with the remainder residing outside the region. Regarding educational background, 56.9% of respondents possessed a training foundation in arts and design; while highly relevant to the study's design focus, this concentration represents a limitation regarding broader generalizability. Finally, substantial digital media usage was observed, with 74.5% of the sample spending over five hours daily online, confirming the genuinely digital-native character of the demographic.

Table 1. Respondent demographic characteristics (N = 51)

Category	Classification	n (%)
Age	17-19 years	10 (19.6%)
	20-22 years	23 (45.1%)

Category	Classification	n (%)
Gender	23-25 years	8 (15.7%)
	26-27 years	10 (19.6%)
	Male	27 (52.9%)
Domicile	Female	24 (47.1%)
	Batam	37 (72.5%)
Background	Tanjung Pinang / Kepri	5 (9.8%)
	Outside the region	9 (17.6%)
	Arts and Design	29 (56.9%)
Digital use	Other programs	22 (43.1%)
	More than 5 hours/day	38 (74.5%)
	5 hours or less/day	13 (25.5%)

4.2 Recognition and Perception of Malay Culture

Table 2 presents the profile of cultural recognition and perception. The data indicate a moderate baseline awareness of Malay culture; only 9.8% of respondents claimed to know the culture very well, whereas the vast majority (80.4%) reported knowing it only fairly or minimally. Regarding specific visual elements, the traditional Malay color system—comprising gold, red, and green—was the most recognized feature (62.7%), followed by traditional architecture (41.2%) and geometric motifs (37.3%). Conversely, the Jawi script (21.6%) and wood-carving art (15.7%) were recognized by relatively few participants.

The most critical finding in this section relates to the perception of current visual representations: 70.6% of respondents perceived existing visual forms as conventional or outdated, while a mere 7.8% found them appealing and aligned with modern tastes. This underscores that the core issue lies not within the cultural content itself, but in its visual execution. This finding aligns with previous observations that the visual representation of Malay cultural identity requires substantial adaptation to remain viable on contemporary digital platforms [7].

Table 2. Recognition and perception of Malay culture (N = 51)

Item	Category	n (%)
Recognition level	Very well / actively involved	5 (9.8%)
	Fairly / a little	41 (80.4%)
	Almost none	5 (9.8%)
Most recognized element	Malay colors (gold, red, green)	32 (62.7%)
	Traditional architecture	21 (41.2%)
	Geometric motifs	19 (37.3%)
	Floral motifs	17 (33.3%)
	Jawi script	11 (21.6%)
Perception of	Appealing and relevant	4 (7.8%)

Item	Category	n (%)
current visual		
	Conventional / behind the times	36 (70.6%)
	Never paid attention	11 (21.6%)

Statement (5-point Likert)	Me	SD
	an	
Overall 20-item scale: $\alpha = 0.838$		

4.3 Visual Preferences of Generation Z

Table 3 presents the mean scores and standard deviations of the twenty preference statements, grouped into the four constructs. Among the four constructs, the Digital Engagement construct recorded the highest mean ($M = 4.02$), which indicates that the respondents are highly disposed to engage with Malay culture through digital channels. The Cultural Value Disposition construct ($M = 3.98$) and the Malay Element Adaptation construct ($M = 3.91$) followed closely, while the Contemporary Aesthetic construct recorded the lowest mean ($M = 3.73$).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for visual-preference items (N = 51)

Statement (5-point Likert)	Me	SD
A. Contemporary aesthetic (construct mean = 3.73; $\alpha = 0.741$)		
Prefer clean, simple, minimalist design	4.02	0.81
Like generous white space	3.63	0.96
Prefer neutral colors over bold colors	3.41	1.10
Prefer simple, readable typography	3.86	0.80
B. Cultural value disposition (construct mean = 3.98; $\alpha = 0.598$)		
Modern-traditional blend feels more meaningful	4.08	0.63
Drawn to authentic cultural content	3.98	0.73
Unique visual elements catch attention	3.96	0.72
Enjoy content carrying a cultural narrative	3.88	0.91
C. Malay element adaptation (construct mean = 3.91; $\alpha = 0.732$)		
Malay motifs appealing in modern minimalist style	3.76	0.76
Jawi script beautiful when adapted	3.73	0.78
Malay colors fresh with modern palette	3.90	0.70
Wood carving has potential as modern illustration	4.02	0.68
Architecture can inspire logos and icons	4.12	0.71
D. Digital engagement (construct mean = 4.02; $\alpha = 0.783$)		
Interested in fresh-style cultural social content	3.96	0.75
Modern Malay design increases regional pride	4.04	0.60
Grasp values via visuals more than long text	4.29	0.76
Short-video content catches attention most	4.18	0.77
More likely to share if visually appealing	4.06	0.76
Would use a dedicated attractive cultural platform	3.80	0.80
Would follow modern Malay cultural accounts	3.80	0.87

At the individual item level, the statement that respondents grasp cultural values more easily through creative visuals than through long text recorded the highest mean ($\$M = 4.29\$$), followed by a strong preference for short-video content ($\$M = 4.18\$$) and the perception that traditional architectural elements can inspire modern logos and digital icons ($\$M = 4.12\$$). These findings reinforce the conclusion that Generation Z prioritizes visual and short-format communication. This pattern aligns with empirical literature indicating that this demographic develops emotional engagement with cultural heritage primarily through visual novelty rather than textual exposition [16], as well as research showing that visual attributes serve as the primary driver of perceived quality within this cohort [15].

Conversely, the preference for neutral colors recorded the lowest mean ($\$M = 3.41\$$) and, notably, the highest standard deviation ($\$SD = 1.10\$$), indicating that this item generated the most polarized responses. This finding is significant because it contradicts a common assumption in Generation Z design literature: that this demographic universally prefers a neutral, minimalist palette. For instance, the conclusion that neutral colors strongly predict Gen Z preferences in general design contexts [14] does not appear to hold within a cultural framework. Similarly, the modernist preferences documented in recent literature [17] do not extend to a desire for total color neutralization. In other words, when assessing a culture meaningful to them, Generation Z rejects the wholesale neutralization of its color palette. Furthermore, the statement that designs blending modern and traditional elements feel more meaningful scored a higher mean ($\$M = 4.08\$$) than the preference for purely minimalist design ($\$M = 4.02\$$). Consequently, rather than replacing tradition with modern aesthetics, respondents favor a hybridization of the two. This serves as the central empirical foundation for the proposed framework, aligning with the theoretical position that contemporary design trends can effectively reinterpret cultural heritage without sacrificing its essence [21].

4.4 Visual Concept Preferences

Table 4 presents preferences for specific visual concepts. An illustration style with a cultural touch was the most preferred aesthetic (35.3%), closely followed by minimalist design featuring subtle cultural accents (31.4%). Regarding elements with the greatest design potential, geometric motifs were selected most

frequently (51.0%), followed by floral motifs (47.1%) and the traditional Malay color palette (41.2%).

With respect to element adaptation, 78.4% of respondents found transforming geometric motifs into modern graphic patterns to be appealing or highly appealing. Conversely, the adaptation of the Jawi script received a more cautious response, with 51.0% stating that such integration would be appealing only if executed with high technical proficiency. This indicates that while the Jawi script holds developmental potential, it requires precise and careful design treatment. This cautious reception aligns with established design precedents emphasizing that integrating culturally specific typographic and symbolic elements demands systematic development to preserve inherent meaning while achieving contemporary legibility [24].

Table 4. Visual concept and element preferences (N = 51)

Item	Option	n (%)
Preferred style	Illustration with cultural touch	18 (35.3%)
	Minimalist with subtle cultural accents	16 (31.4%)
	Flat design, bright colors	8 (15.7%)
	2D motion graphic	7 (13.7%)
	Maximalist, rich detail	2 (3.9%)
Highest-potential element	Geometric motif	26 (51.0%)
	Floral motif	24 (47.1%)
	Malay color palette	21 (41.2%)
	Traditional architecture	14 (27.5%)
	Wood carving	10 (19.6%)
Geometric motif adaptation	Appealing / very appealing	40 (78.4%)
	Jawi script as display font	
Jawi script as display font	Appealing but needs careful execution	26 (51.0%)
	Very appealing	8 (15.7%)

4.5 Thematic Analysis of Open-Ended Answers

The thematic analysis of the open-ended responses clarifies and extends the quantitative findings. Regarding why the younger generation perceives the visual appeal of Malay culture as low, three primary themes emerged. The first and most dominant theme is a perceived lack of modern relevance, characterized by descriptions such as "old-fashioned," "behind the times," and "not aligned with contemporary developments." The second theme concerns the traditional color palette, where multiple respondents specifically identified the predominant gold and brown

tones as drivers of this outdated impression. The third theme is visual complexity, with participants characterizing existing representations as overly detailed and crowded. Additionally, a fourth recurring theme identified a lack of promotion and exposure. These qualitative insights align with the perceptual data discussed previously and correspond with broader preservation literature, which identifies the under-representation of Malay culture in contemporary media as a critical threat to cultural continuity [5].

Regarding the ideal visual identity, the dominant theme centered on combining modern, minimalist aesthetics with the deliberate retention of Malay essence. Crucially, while respondents requested simpler and more contemporary layouts, a significant cohort explicitly demanded that traditional Malay colors and motifs be preserved, using expressions such as "the essence must remain" and "there should still be a Malay feel." This qualitative insight directly corroborates the quantitative finding regarding the low preference and high polarization toward neutral colors, providing a clear empirical mandate for hybridization rather than absolute neutralization.

In terms of delivery, channels such as TikTok and Instagram were chosen almost unanimously as the most effective platforms due to their expansive reach, algorithmic distribution, and high engagement rates among Generation Z. Consequently, the qualitative and quantitative data converge on a unified conclusion, reinforcing established literature on the centrality of short-format digital media in shaping contemporary cultural engagement for this demographic [2], [3].

4.6 The Hybrid Malay Visual Identity Framework (HMVIF)

Based on the synthesis of quantitative and qualitative findings, the Hybrid Malay Visual Identity Framework (HMVIF) is formulated. This framework consists of three dynamically interacting dimensions: the cultural dimension, the contemporary aesthetic dimension, and the digital communication dimension. The HMVIF is explicitly grounded in the empirical finding that Generation Z demands hybridization rather than the complete replacement of tradition. This positioning aligns with established historical preservation strategies—specifically Historical Revival, Eclectic Historicism, and Free Historicism—and directly operationalizes the Eclectic Historicism strategy at a visual-identity scale [20].

The transformation of quantitative survey results into a conceptual visual identity was not treated as a direct translation, but as a structured inference process grounded in the ideate stage of Design Thinking [18], [19] and the principles of data-informed design.

Literature evaluating the relationship between data-driven design and the creative process indicates that empirical data function most effectively when interpreted as one input within a designerly reasoning process, rather than as a deterministic rule dictating final form [26]. In accordance with this position, the descriptive statistics were treated as design indicators—where the mean score signals preference strength and the standard deviation reflects the degree of consensus—and each indicator was triangulated against the qualitative thematic findings before integration into the final framework.

Based on this logic, three transformation rules were applied. First, items and constructs with high mean scores were designated as design drivers that the visual identity must foreground: namely, digital engagement disposition (\$M = 4.02\$), the primacy of visual communication over long text (\$M = 4.29\$), the suitability of short-video formats (\$M = 4.18\$), and the potential of architectural elements to inspire logos and icons (\$M = 4.12\$). These indicators directly informed the digital communication dimension and the icon strategy within the Compatibility Matrix. Second, the item with the lowest mean and highest dispersion—the preference for neutral colors (\$M = 3.41\$, \$SSD = 1.10\$)—was interpreted as a design constraint rather than a mandate for color neutralization. Because this low, highly polarized score converged with explicit qualitative demands to preserve traditional visual identity, the characteristic Malay color palette was fixed as a non-negotiable cultural anchor rather than an adjustable variable. Third, a comparative reading of adjacent items, where the preference for a modern-traditional blend (\$M = 4.08\$) exceeded the preference for a purely minimalist design (\$M = 4.02\$), provided a directional signal toward hybridization over substitution. Collectively, these rules explicitly map each framework dimension to an empirical basis within Table 5, ensuring a traceable trajectory from measured preference to recommended transformation strategy.

Consequently, the resulting Hybrid Malay Visual Identity Framework (HMVIF) operates across three dynamically interacting dimensions:

- a. **The Cultural Dimension:** Serving as the foundation of value, meaning, and authenticity, it encompasses traditional elements—such as ornamental motifs, the color system, Jawi script, wood carving, and architectural symbolism—with the traditional color palette positioned as a non-negotiable element.
- b. **The Contemporary Aesthetic Dimension:** Functioning as a bridge to Generation Z visual preferences, it utilizes adaptive

minimalism to simplify visual forms without stripping meaning, maintaining a clear visual hierarchy and a hybrid composition.

- c. **The Digital Communication Dimension:** Ensuring optimal delivery across short-video ecosystems, specifically TikTok and Instagram, which were identified as primary engagement channels.

Table 5 presents the Compatibility Matrix that operationalizes the HMVIF by mapping each traditional Malay element against its corresponding demographic preference and recommended transformation strategy. This matrix serves as a practical guide for visual designers. Systematically integrating cultural values into a visual identity system via Design Thinking produces an identity that is simultaneously authentic and communicative [24]. Furthermore, by establishing the Malay color palette as a non-negotiable anchor, the HMVIF directly addresses the empirical contradictions observed in this study against the universal neutral-palette assumptions often found in contemporary design literature [14], [17].

Table 5. Compatibility Matrix of the Hybrid Malay Visual Identity Framework

Malay Element	Generation Z Preference	Transformation Strategy
Floral motif	Organic, biophilic aesthetic [16]	Distill into flat design and clean line art
Geometric motif	Clean, structured, repetitive pattern [14]	Digital pattern, animated background, UI accent
Jawi script	Unique typography, executed carefully [present study; 24]	Hybrid Jawi-Latin display type for headlines
Color system	Bold palette, retained, not neutralized [present study]	Reinterpret cultural colors as a modern brand palette
Wood carving	Rich visual detail as authenticity marker [4]	Textured digital illustration, scalable graphics
Architecture	Authentic, specific sense of place [16]	Icons, pictograms, logomarks across platforms

4.7 Implications and Limitations

Theoretically, the HMVIF contributes a conceptual model that bridges culture-based visual communication design with the visual preferences of the digital generation, while offering an empirical counterpoint to generalized color-neutralization assumptions within contemporary Generation Z design literature [14], [17]. Practically, the Compatibility Matrix provides a structured framework for visual designers, cultural institutions, and the regional government of the Riau Archipelago when developing Malay-based visual identities. However, several limitations must be

acknowledged. First, the sample size of 51 respondents limits the generalizability of the findings to the broader Generation Z population, despite its adequacy for descriptive and exploratory aims. Second, the high concentration of respondents with an arts and design background may introduce a bias toward individuals who are already highly visually literate. Third, the Cultural Value Disposition construct yielded lower internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.598$), indicating a need for item refinement. Fourth, the cross-sectional design captures demographic preferences at a single point in time. Consequently, future research should expand the sample size to achieve proportional representation, refine and revalidate the instrument, and develop and empirically test a visual prototype based on the HMVIF to measure its actual effectiveness.

5. Conclusions

This study mapped Generation Z's visual preferences toward Malay cultural arts to formulate the Hybrid Malay Visual Identity Framework (HMVIF). The findings indicate that while Generation Z perceives current Malay visual representations as conventional and outdated, they maintain a high willingness to engage with the culture when it is delivered through visual, short-format media. Crucially, the most significant and novel insight from this research is that Generation Z rejects a generic, neutral, and minimalist palette that strips away cultural identity; instead, they demand a hybridization that preserves characteristic colors and motifs within a modernized overall composition.

This discovery directly challenges prevailing assertions in Generation Z design literature [14], [17] specifically when applied to culturally meaningful visual systems. Consequently, the HMVIF—which synthesizes cultural, contemporary aesthetic, and digital communication dimensions—is proposed as a practical reference for engineering Malay cultural visual identities that are modern, communicative, and firmly rooted in local values. Future empirical endeavors will focus on developing and testing a visual prototype based on this framework, particularly within the geographical context of the Riau Archipelago.

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